Matt Sessions
The Underlying Cause Analyst

Mindy: [00:00:00] Welcome to Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. It's like coffee with an analyst, or it could be whiskey with an analyst reading a spreadsheet, linking crime events, identifying a series, and getting the latest scoop on association news and training. So please don't beat that analyst and join us as we define the law enforcement analysis profession.

One episode at a time.

Jason: Thank you for joining me. I hope many aspects of your life are progressing. My name is Jason Elder and today our guest has 10 years of police department experience with zero years of law enforcement analysis experience, but he plays one at work. He is currently the learning and research consultant for Cambridge Center for Evidence-Based Policing in the uk.

He also spent time as the problem solving tactical advisor to both Warwickshire Police and sre. Police department. He holds a Master's of science and forensic psychology from the University of Kent here to talk about, among other things, of course, problem solving. Please welcome [00:01:00] Matt Sessions. Matt, how are we doing?

Matt: Excellent. Thanks for having me here today, Jason.

Jason: And how is the UK these days?

Matt: It's pretty good. It's pretty, I suppose it depends how you look at it. Turbulent, I mean, politics. I, I suppose we shouldn't maybe get onto that already. Politics in the uk maybe Politics in America are both turbulent times, I'd say.

Jason: All right, well, hey, I, I you ask that question, you never know what answer you get. We could be just like old men and talk about the weather, but yeah, you can always talk about politics and it's always a turbulent topic.

Matt: Definitely. And it's funny you should say that about the weather because just a few hours ago, my own father.

Sent me a text saying, I've got a weather warning for your area. I live nowhere near him and he has weather warnings on his app for my area, just so he can update me to talk about the weather. So I think he'd love to be joining in that conversation., It is funny how that becomes a topic of conversation as you get older.

So,

Jason: all right. For our listeners, of course Matt is not my typical guest that I have on the [00:02:00] show, but as I mentioned that he has had a career in problem solving and we have not had. An opportunity, I guess, to talk about problem oriented policing in quite some time. So I thought he was a, a perfect guest to have on here to give us a different perspective.

So. Alright, Matt, first, how did you discover problem solving?

Matt: I mean, it kind of just fell upon me really. I mean, I guess if I go back to my education and where that came from. Studied as you said, psychology and then forensic psychology at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom. After that I was kind of looking around what will I do next?

Do I, do I do the doctorate or a, or a PhD? Do I just continue being the forever student? At that point I was kind of thinking, okay, do you know what I want to just start working somewhere? And because I'd studied forensic psychology and my interest around that, I guess I was kind of naturally drawn to whether it's working in a prison or a secure unit or within some form of criminal justice.

[00:03:00] So naturally it's not surprising that I probably looked at policing. I did actually sign up to alerts to, to get on the fast track scheme, which I dunno if you have an equivalent in, in the states whereby you'd start as a constable but sort of receive extra additional training and have to do extra project work to progress to the rank of inspector.

Sort of quite quickly. But after almost immediately it seems, I hope that wasn't the reason why me applying for it, why they pulled it. But within a few about a month or two, they they pulled that scheme or paused it at least. So I thought, okay, I'm gonna need to do something else. Maybe I won't, won't be an officer.

And I basically found the first job I could find that was in policing it was working in Intel as a processor. I didn't really know what any of that meant. I didn't know the world of policing at all. I started in that and I did that for a year

and I really struggled. And that's probably the closest role I'd have to a lot of your listeners, I guess, working in Intel as a, as a processor.

The reason I really struggled with it was because I was just processing [00:04:00] information. You receive a call, someone smells drugs next door. Some other piece of intel. You sanitize it, you put it on the system, data input, data entry. You share it with the right people to make sure the right people get it, and then you move on to the next one.

And you go home at the end of the day and guess what? You're coming back in the next day. And there's a whole load of more data to process. And I think I really struggled with that because you couldn't really put your own spin on it. You couldn't do much with it. There weren't many opportunities to develop.

So I kind of tried to take on some extracurricular projects. I think I remember I was doing one project supporting someone with their master's actually around domestic abuse and restorative justice. That involved me calling up suspects and offenders of. Of domestic abuse and asking them questions around restorative justice.

So that was quite eye-opening. I think someone sort of full-time student up until this point coming in and, and then trying to sort of expand my learning and knowledge a little bit and having to call up offenders, having just sat in a backroom office job effectively processing data. So doing that [00:05:00] kind of thing started to open me up to, to different opportunities.

And then I moved on to a safeguarding role. I thought it was gonna be a lot more exciting. Mm-hmm. I thought that I was gonna be triaging with multi agencies all around and we'd be making decisions about risk and what we would do around vulnerable adults and children that police were coming into contact with and working with statutory agencies in the uk.

So your children's services, adult social care people that work in mental health. I thought it was gonna be this exciting job and it turned out that scratched a little bit beneath the surface and it was exactly the same job that I just come from in. Instead of processing Intel reports, so someone saying there's some smell of drugs next door.

I was processing child and adult vulnerability reports. So the officers would come into contact with the child, they would submit the report, it would explain what happened. I was, add a bit extra to it, do a little bit of research on the

system to add some extra clarity, share it with the relevant partner agency, and [00:06:00] never hear about it again.

And I, again, really struggled with that because I was back in that same situation about not being able to add much value or the value that I was adding. I didn't feel like it was hugely contributing or making a difference. So again, what did I do? I started looking around for other things to do, other opportunities within my role and, and to sort of do project work and develop how we do things and make, make it better.

And one thing that I'd noticed which is really the, the prelude if you like, to me getting in, into, into problem solving was that consistently when we would complete these referrals, I would see that other referrals had been generated but hadn't come via our team. And our team was this central team, if you like, that all of these referrals should come through and we would then have the responsibility of sharing them with the right agencies.

But I would see that lots of them would come in, hadn't been shared and to a lot of the department, if I'm being honest, it was a sort of, well that's that extra, that's not part of our job. [00:07:00] To, to question that or to ask why that that happens. It, it just happens. Sometimes they don't come to us and I can leave that where it is because my job is to go through these reports that I get given at the start of the day.

I get through them and I start again the next day. But to me. I found that incredibly infuriating. And when you would read through them and then subsequently share them, you would sometimes find so much risk And concerning things like, for example, let's say an officer goes out and there's a child who's self-harming and has been suicidal.

And naturally we complete a referral as police officers to make sure that other agencies who have a responsibility get that information and can act and safeguard that child well what if that referral got lost in the system? Obviously the, the sort of negatives of that, the, the, the worst case scenario are pretty dire.

And there are many that will fall through the cracks and won't get picked up on until something really significant happens. So that really didn't sit very well with me, [00:08:00] so I would regularly pick up on these. So the point that I said to my a, a, a department lead we really ought to do something about this.

Do you mind if I have some extra time to, you know one day a week or something to, to look through these and, and work out the extent to which this is

actually a problem? That was kind of a phrase that that we would use in in the uk. I dunno if it would translate poo-pooed. It sounds, it sounds very English, doesn't it?

It sounds so English. It was poo-pooed. It was put down as as, as the reason was that was we have enough work already. Why do we want to give us more work? So a little bit of time went by and I asked again, except this time I didn't ask the same person. I asked my immediate line manager and my immediate line manager was someone who was very blue, very analytically minded, very logical thinker who said, well, lay it out for me.

What's the kind of case for this? And when I did that, he said. That makes complete sense that we should do that. Okay. Why don't you just spend X amount of time over the next month doing this and then we'll take it together to, to the [00:09:00] bosses and I'll kind of back you on it. So I did this work and I found that 9% of every single one of those referrals that was completed that should have come to us, never came to us.

So that's almost one in 10 of these potentially really risky piece of information never coming to us. So as a result of that, we raised it up the flag power, if you like. I then put recommendations in place how we might change that to eradicate that issue and stop it from happening to protect people.

That got implemented. We checked to make sure that it was having the right effect. There was also a safety net just in case things slipped through. And at the end of it I. Basically hadn't realized that I'd sort of been problem solving, and I only realized that I'd been problem solving when I found out what problem solving was, which is when I applied for a problem solving tactical advisor role thinking that that job title sounds pretty cool.

And, and when I gave them that as an example in my interview, they said to me, you are a problem solver. You just don't realize it yet. Which I thought that sounds a pretty good feedback to get on the interview. Saying is the job title is problem solving tactical [00:10:00] advisor, but I still don't exactly know or understand or appreciate what exactly they're saying.

It's probably only now in retrospect that I realize I really was doing it not as well. Undoubtedly as I, as I maybe think I could do it now with a bit more experience. I was probably just playing at it. But that kind of led me to the world of problem solving.

Jason: Yeah, so, well, it fits the theme, right? You, you're an analyst, you just don't know it.

You, you're a problem solver. You just don't know it. As I listen to your story, I think it's fascinating. How just different folks are and how different people's journeys can be, because there's certain people that get into a job like that, that's very clerical, very straightforward, and they're as happy as a clam to sit there and do the, tasks that you were describing there, where it was just data entry or just, you know.

Making sure that certain reports get to the certain, certain places or just to [00:11:00] stay in the lane that you were hired to do and then mm-hmm. There's nothing wrong with that per se, but I think with analyst, with problem solvers, there is something there that it's I don't know if it's a free spirit type of thing or what, but it's something that, as you mentioned, it doesn't sit well and you just can't sit still and just take it.

Right. For a lack of a better, better term. ., Do you feel that you were always this way even growing up?

Matt: I think so. Now you're saying that, now I'm thinking back. Mm-hmm. I, I think so. I think it's kind of born out of this pure, purely logic driven. Kind of personality and way of seeing the world, just as you've described in terms of the not happy and content staying in your lane.

There's something about, there's a logical way, there's a better way to be doing this. Why shouldn't we be doing this? Which I think for those people that have it and have that view of the world. They find it incomprehensible that [00:12:00] other people don't have that view of the world. It's, it's impossible to put yourself in in someone else's shoes and, and sit there and go, how would you be happy with that?

And, and obviously people are completely entitled to be happy with, with doing that. There are more things important things in this world than work. In particular, I think that's something I probably struggle with being able to switch off from problem solving. And, and that's a, that's one issue I think when you get into this world and you see everything through the lens of, of causes and, and, and different ways of doing things.

You can't stop but see it in everything that you do. Whether I'm like driving along the road and see a sign written in a certain way, and it just makes me think about this. I think it's innate and it's interesting. I mean, skipping along

quite a bit already, but I've had conversations with people around problem solving before where I've kind of debated and said,

can we really give this to the masses? Is it accessible enough to the masses? Should we get everyone involved in doing this? And I, I speak to some people that say, oh, Matt, we [00:13:00] have to, it's the right thing to do. We have to, and I say, I know it's the perfect idyllic world. And these problem oriented forces where everyone gets it, everyone feeds into it perfectly and everyone gets their, their role.

But whether or not actually everyone is, is built that way or has, that way of thinking. You don't need to all have that perfect way of thinking. Of course there are different roles for people to play, but it's something that I've definitely struggle with at times where you're trying to get the masses to do it.

And, and not everyone can quite see the perspective, the way that you can see it.

Jason: Yeah, it definitely is a mindset. I, think of my own career. Looking back and once I got into the role of an analyst, I actually found I was gravitating towards process, process improvement, data improvement, and my, career has, gone more along the lines of.

A data analyst and managing data as opposed to some of the other avenues that an [00:14:00] analyst can go at, whether it's problem solving or tactical. Strategic, . But , for me, it was this idea of like, well, this data flow is horrible and I, I can't, I, it is, it, it is something inside me that says, like, I, I wanna improve it.

Like, it shouldn't be this hard. So we, we have to spend time of thinking of the best ways to improve. And I, I think in a way, if I'm hearing you correct, I think that's the similar path where you landed, where you got into a role and thought, well there's definitely gotta be a better way to do business.

Matt: Definitely. And I think the way that you've explained that there, I think if I hadn't fallen into that, that role that had appeared at that time, at a time where I was probably. Desperate for a different role to get me excited. Mm-hmm. I think it could have been anything, and I would've found a way of making it like that, whether it could have had nothing to do with, with problem oriented policing, but that logical, that process, like you said, whether it was, if it was, [00:15:00] I could have fallen into exactly the same role role, what that you described around improving data quality because it made sense.

Why are we not improving this? Because you can see that the, the benefits that it could have, finding ways of improving that, making it more usable, could, I could have potentially got just the same joy out of that as preventing loads of crime. And that's something I think I, I I sometimes talk to people about that.

I, you can sometimes struggle with mentally the kind of self-reflection of do I, do I do problem oriented policing because it's the right thing to do by the communities because it's going to result in less crime? Or do I do it because it just. Damn logical sense. Like we should just definitely be doing it this way.

The alternative is not as good simply, simply speaking. And I think that's, I, I've, I've come to accept that that's okay. It's okay for me to think that, do you know what we should all be doing problem solving? Because it's the best way of working. It's effective and it's efficient. Not just because I have some deep [00:16:00] thing within me that says I need to give back to my community and I have to do something that is fulfilling and protect people that can, that can be part of it.

And I can feel good about that when that happens. But as, as you've kind of pointed out there, that I could have, I could have potentially like yourself, maybe pointed that, that perspective at one of a number of jobs and, and probably found the same internal joy at resolving problems, whether they were.

Policing issues and crime prevention or something. Absolutely. Something logistical in a private business, for example.

Jason: Yeah. As you mentioned, you get the title, you move on to being an actual problem solving tactical advisor and this is right at March of 2020. So this is right on the brink of Yeah.

Of COVID. And so I guess take us back to that time, walking into the police department. And just how you felt, what you [00:17:00] experienced,

Matt: I think it was obviously, given what you just said, I mean, the worst time in history to create a new team, mm-hmm.

It was the, it was the, it was the first team in the force that we'd had dedicated to problem solving. I'd gone from always working in the office to suddenly being given a laptop, not that we had laptops to start off with, so we had to go into the office. But two of our small team had laptops, so they worked from home and there was two of us that didn't have laptops.

So we went into the office during COVID and, and it was the two of us sat there and our boss, who was great. Our chief inspector at the time, mark offered, who then went on, I, I believe he's now, whether his superintendent or chief superintendent he was great except he was almost immediately seconded to the, the forces' response to COVID.

Mm-hmm. So it was kind of, okay, you guys crack on and, and kind of do what you feel need to be done. Which, which in many ways was really great because it gave us that freedom to read up on academic theory and understand a bit more about what this whole world of problem oriented policing [00:18:00] was. The, the challenge was that I was having only worked in policing for about four years at that point and mm-hmm.

And not within problem oriented policing. I was by far and away the, the senior person in that team, because my colleague, who was in the same role was an external candidate, so she came from. A different background. She was looking for a career change and she joined knowing nothing about policing at all in terms of the culture and the, the acronyms and the, the departments and the way things work, which looking back, I think maybe I'm harsh about my first couple of roles, but in actual fact, I'd have to just accept that I was young and it was the first couple of roles that allowed me to understand the organization and the world of policing a bit better.

But that meant I had a figuratively speaking more senior role or there was a bit of responsibility there, but, but to be honest, I didn't really feel like it because I didn't know anything about this world. So we kind of just jumbled it together. Put together what we kind of thought made sense.

And I would say one of the hardest things about that was that this world [00:19:00] of, of problematic policing and problem solving can be incredibly isolating for people that are working in it. I, I mean, I can't speak for all the various departments in America, but with 43 forces in the uk when in England and Wales specifically you've got so many different ways of working and that's just 43.

I mean I don't, I don't want to know how many departments there are in America in comparison.

Jason: Mm-hmm.

Matt: But in many of these forces, there are no problem solving roles. Right. In some of them it's an attachment onto someone's, like a bolt on your, a champion of problem solving. You are this, you are that.

And for some, we have tactical advisors. Now, for us, there wasn't any blueprint. There was no team before. We had to kind of make it up as we went along, which was really challenging when trying to deliver training and having to. Do talk people through the process and explain what they ought to do.

Because I'll be honest, like anybody who's a few months into the job, we didn't really know what it involved. And I mean, I'm sure if I watch myself back now giving those training inputs and giving advice to people, I would, I would die and I would die [00:20:00] of cringe at even like, turn of phrases and think, oh God, Matt, why are you wording it like that?

That's the wrong way, or that's not a good idea. I think I do, you know what, if I'm gonna be honest, then I'm gonna admit 'cause it's one of my, one of the things I talk about most often during training. Now, I think right there in my first training session, I definitely tell people. Don't worry about assessment, the last stage of problem solving.

That's at the end. We'll deal with that when we get to it. And now that is just like one of the red flag. Don't you dare say that. You need to start thinking about it really early on. But we didn't have anyone to learn from particularly. We were really beneficial that a couple of academics who were massive and still are massive in that world.

Aiden side bottom and Karen Bullock both gave us gave us both time right early on just to have a chat about things and kind of let us know. The sort of just the basics about what this world was all about. It probably wasn't until I actually did my first effort, if you like, and only to this point, effort in actually owning a [00:21:00] problem that I really kind of started to understand a lot more about the challenges and, and, and the benefits and, and really get to experience what it was like and be able to then train people in, in what it's actually like.

Jason: Yeah, I, I think a lot of, what I've heard from other departments, it. I don't know the exact, I'm gonna butcher the exact saying, but it's you're, you're building the car while it's moving. Right? And you're, yeah. I, I think one of the problems that I think happens is you have this new unit or this new project and it's like, oh, we have to produce something as quickly as possible instead of sitting back and actually strategically planning and building the unit or the project to.

To make sure that every piece is well thought out instead of just doing something as quickly as possible or just being [00:22:00] reactive, like play whack-a-mole on a, on some issue, trying to throw as many problem solving techniques at it as you can.

Matt: Yeah, I mean, I mean, that analogy will resonate with anyone in the world of.

Of problem policing in terms of thinking about reacting to problems and just throwing, throwing a scatter gun of of interventions at something. I think at the time I think I probably wasn't experienced enough to, and I wasn't being paid, or that wasn't in my job description, if you like to, to take a step back and think more strategically about it.

And our, our strategic leader, who was great, as I said, was immediately seconded to another department to deal with, with COVID. So we didn't have, we, we probably, to be fair, just had the luxury of time to be able to do that in, in our defense, because it was a new team. There wasn't anyone hounding us because everyone was so busy with COVID and, and everything going on with that.

But because it was just the two of us in this whole new world and we were [00:23:00] kind of muddling through it. I think we weren't thinking strategically enough about it. As I say that I wasn't in that role, if you like, and that that was a role that when I moved onto the, the second force that I worked for, where I was then in taking a fairly minor but a, a management role I had to start thinking more strategically and less about single individual plans.

That might be a, might be a good winner. And actually more how do we embed this? How do we work with analysts? How do we work with other departments? What's the data quality side of things? How do we record it? How do we evaluate it? I was a, I was a, I was a piece in the cog if I was a cog in the machine, rather.

Mm-hmm. Rather than the second, role having to take on more of the, that autonomy around the whole of the, the machine, if you like.

Jason: Yeah. So I, do want to get to the award-winning projects that you worked on, but I am curious about the first project that you work on, that the deciding the, the, the first problem that you identified and how you worked through it.[00:24:00]

Matt: Well, that was, that was the, wasn't

Jason: Oh, see, like, look, hey, it just naturally happened. You know you didn't need to cut your teeth.

Matt: Well, well, I mean, it took a long time. It took a lot of effort. And I think it was a bit like. When I look back at like, Goldstein, Herman Goldstein came up with Pop and when he originally did the original couple of studies on it to really like showcase what it was, you look back at those, they're like 150 pages.

And I, I'm looking back at that thinking, wow he'd come up with this, this way of thinking by God he was gonna do it to the nth degree. He was really going to, to, to really smash it, if you like, and, and try and cover every single area. And obviously I would scale mine down, so like 2% of that in comparison.

But I, I took the same attitude towards it in terms of saying, if I'm going to do this and I'm gonna teach people about it, then by God I'm going to do this to the nth degree and try and do this as well as possible. So, yeah. What happened was our we had a a serious organized crime unit. So a department that focused on organized [00:25:00] criminals and they'd noticed an influx in the number of catalytic converter thefts that we were having.

So catalytic converters being bit underneath your car. Not on electric vehicles, but on, on normal and hybrid vehicles that clean the emissions coming out there. And they contain lots of precious metals that people like going after around COVID. There was a massive spike in the number of incidents.

It was, it was. Correlated with the with the price, the value of the metal. So why offenders were going after them? I think from memory, the states was a little bit slow. The offenders in the states were a little bit slow on this compared to the uk. We'd sort of spiked the year before before it came to you guys.

But it definitely, it definitely came. And they'd noticed this issue and they'd been made aware that our team had been created really. And they sort of said, well, we've been trying our hand up. Doing covert operations and just and, and at the same time, neighborhood teams, local teams doing overt patrols and it's not really working.

It's things are just getting worse. It was one of those, when I describe it to people and, and share people the slides [00:26:00] around it, it was one of those perfect scanning opportunities where the, the scanning writes itself, the

justification writes itself because you've got one of those lovely bar charts that just goes like a staircase.

So everything is just going up as the, the quarters progress really nicely, which kind of said, okay, this is the perfect time for us to be, to be tackling this. So they kind of approached us and said, would you like to work on work on it with us? And I thought it was a great opportunity to actually have a go at properly owning it or co-owning it with the inspector at the time.

So I said, great, I'll, I'll start working on it from a problem zone perspective and went through all the motions and I'm sure I'd do a million things. Differently now, but what, what the data side of things that came out, and I did the analysis myself and what I should say is that we actually had two analysts in our team, but I really wanted to do a lot of this work myself to actually experience what it was like because we were asking frontline officers to be doing this, a lot of this work.

So I I, I wanted to go through and, and kind of learn. So as I were going through the, the, the [00:27:00] thing that jumped out at me, the, the, everyone talks about the light bulb moment. It doesn't always happen, the light bulb moment, but what it does, it's. It's memorable and it's, it's very enjoyable. The light bulb moment.

Yeah, it is very, and that, that, that moment for me was seeing that 94.7% of CATA converter thefts were not reported via 9 9 9. So our emergency contact number in the uk, and to other people that might not sound exciting, that might not sound enlightening. But combined with the rest of the picture that we're seeing and that kind of thought process around causal factors and what is contributing and why do we see the patterns that we see, not simply reporting descriptive statistics and saying, oh yeah, they're not reporting via 9, 9, 9, saying, what does that mean?

What does that tell us? Putting all this information together. We came up with the idea that actually this was happening so frequently in busy car parks in the middle of the day because there was just no [00:28:00] risk for thieves. So they were doing these crimes in in clear sight of other people. Because they knew they could get away with it and they could take their time.

I mean, it took them 60 seconds normally, but they didn't have to rush. They would nick 10 in one go. Sometimes they would just go from car to car. So if you, I always sort of say if you put your elbow through a car window back in

the day, I dunno if that happens much anymore to be honest. What with what with windows these days?

But everyone turns around. Everyone looks, someone calls police security are coming over. There's a commotion you need to get out of there quickly. Whereas you put on a high vis jacket and jack up a car and either people don't see it. Or they, because it's, it's, it's blending in. Or if they see it, they think, oh, that's a shame.

Someone's, someone's broken down. They need some assistance. Mm-hmm. So, because of that, because the fact that it was happening in busy car parks in the middle of the day, we were kind of thinking, hang on a minute. Shouldn't we be getting loads of 9, 9, 9 calls? This is happening in front of people and it's really loud.

It should be really obvious, [00:29:00] but it wasn't. So we were realizing that this was contributing to the problem. It was making it really easy. And one way of us to resolve this would be to improve what we call the, the capable guardianship of people around. So I pitched it that people were incapable guardians because they were there, but they were incapable of making a difference because their presence made no difference whatsoever to the offenders.

It wouldn't matter if someone's walking past. So we needed to change that. So everything that we did was around awareness. So we kind of threw every other response in the bin and, and to give you a selection of some of the other things that were going on, you were having patrols. Even though even if you have a high sort of hotspot car park, you're not talking about huge numbers when you consider every hour of the day right across a month.

So what's the chance of you, of you being there in that moment trying to cover across a, a, a wide, a wide area across a county? It is pretty unlikely. We actually even had an example where offenders waited for police to leave the car park before then offending, [00:30:00] which I think was the perfect example to give to local teams to say, look, it's not working guys.

This, this isn't actually deterring the problem. So everything was about comms. One of the comms that we were putting out, I was har back to beforehand and all forces, to be honest, in the UK were doing it. We were saying park under a light. But this was happening in the, in the middle of the day, but we were still telling people park under a light.

They were, we were telling people don't park up a curb. So the sides are up on the, the few for American listers up on the sidewalk, if you like, in terms of up, up with two leg two wheels up. Because that gives access to under the vehicle. But. It takes them all of about five seconds to jack the car up.

They are not just looking for cars where you can get a little bit of extra access underneath. So these are the kind of things that we were, we were putting out. And it wasn't making a blind bit of difference, but it wouldn't stop us putting them out all the time. And I think that's another thing that will resonate with, with problem solvers out there, seeing forces routinely doing the [00:31:00] same things over and over with not really an understanding of whether or not those things are gonna work or not.

So we changed the narrative. Everything was about awareness raising of what it looks like, what it sounds like. Call 9 9 9, sort of cutting through everything else. So lots of visuals. We did interviews. There was campaigns in person with big adverts on the side of a van leaflet in the right cars in the right areas, rather.

As I say, lots of interviews and presentations. We created a, an advert on an online advert with a, with a, with a vehicle company. We did loads of. And what did we see? Well, we, the key thing was we didn't just see crime come down, but we actually measured the other things. We measured 9, 9, 9 calls.

We measured how many suspect vehicles were identified so on and so forth. And that actually generated a load of arrests in a short period of time. And we hadn't arrested anyone for six months and. Stack bought, bought us some credibility, if you like, with local officers. Mm-hmm. That they were excited about that element.

It, it pains me obviously that that was the bit that they were more excited about, but we could use that as [00:32:00] leverage, if you like to say, well actually, look, there's, there's something in it. For that side of things, enforcing the law as well. There are these opportunities to, to nick people as well.

But that would contribute to the overall sort of elevation of risk. And we would really publicize that where we could in terms of , the arrests that were happening, but also the creating this idea that anyone in that car park might be about to call the police and that that risk is elevated, made the difference.

And we saw huge reductions in the number of our thefts compared to nearby forces that didn't see those reductions when, when we compared. And what I would say is that. The, the, the assessment, the evaluation we did of that was by

no means watertight in any way, shape or form. We didn't run statistical analyses and all of that kind of thing the controls, they weren't controls, it was just comparisons with other forces, especially because when you're doing something on a large scale, it's very difficult to have control groups.

It wasn't like we were just targeting one car part that wouldn't have made much a difference across a whole across a whole force. But what I did was I measured things along the way that I was [00:33:00] looking for. So it was almost like hypothesis testing of, well, if I see this in the data, that will give me a confidence that this is happening and what would I expect to see next and next and next until finally we see those reduction in offending.

And that's exactly what we saw, which gave me a lot more confidence. I think if I just looked at the number of. Thefts and saw they reduced, I wouldn't have felt confident that we had actually made that difference. But for me, that was the one in terms of being able to do that project, see it through, become a bit obsessed over it.

I was unfortunately checking crime stats every day and I would not advise. And I know there'll be many of your analysts out there that will do the same thing and they'll buy into it. And I completely get it. But try not to, because it just takes over your life. I mean, it does make it feel when you have another day, another day without one on there you feel more confident and you and then, and then you see there's a spate of a three or four the next day and, and it, and you, it is heart wrenching.

But but no, that was the, that was the, that was the thing that kind of kicked everything off.

Jason: So why weren't the victims [00:34:00] calling 9, 9 9? '

Matt: cause they didn't know what it looked like. Well, so they had no clue that this was a crime.

Jason: But I'm talking about the people that owned the vehicles. When the people that came back to their car in the parking lot started their car and their car wouldn't run, they realized that the, mm-hmm.

The vehicle had been tampered and the Cadillac converter was stolen. Why did they not then call police and report the theft?

Matt: Well, you had a mix, right? So you had some that didn't realize. A crime had occurred, and I've put that in the majority actually. They would call their breakdown service company and say, my car's making a funny noise.

You need to have someone sent out. They would explain it and they said, you've been a victim of crime. And they would go, what? And at that point they would then call 1 0 1, which is our non-emergency slow time police response line. Oh, okay. And, and it would be too late. They obviously wouldn't be calling 9 9 9 for [00:35:00] most of these because they were in car parks where they were in the, they were working in the supermarket or they were visiting somewhere or in hospitals.

So, I mean, it from an emotional point of view, it was highly impacted because it was happening in the middle of COVID and mm-hmm. I don't, I, I don't know. I, I, I dunno what the language was used was, was like in America, but the language over here was all about key workers and that encompassed everyone who was working, still sort of public facing at the time of COVID.

So that, whether that was hospitals that was police or whether that. Supermarket workers who had to keep going to work. So it was targeting those particular individuals. So they would come back to their car hours later. Probably an important detail that I've, I've, I, I missed out. I'm glad that you picked up on that.

'cause that was the kind of key punchline, I guess, after the 95%, is that that why they didn't recognize it was because they didn't know what it looked like, and therefore we needed to educate them about, about what it looked like.

Jason: Hmm. Yeah. And I've talked to analysts that, and even during my time as an analyst did [00:36:00] there, as soon as the price of , those metals would go up, we would see an uptick in Cadillac converter theft.

And I, I think a lot of the response was targeting the scrap yards, uhhuh, the, the people that were taking in the catalytic converters , coming up with a program where they. Had an idea of who was coming in with like 10 catalytic converters at a time. Definitely like being able to document like, who is this person?

And set allowing them to have cameras and allow them to go back and say, okay, yeah, this person came in with like 10 different catalytic converters on this day, and you that was able to curve a lot of the problem because then they would have inventory and not any real ability to get rid of the inventory.

Matt: And, and that, that what you've touched on there is the perfect. Explanation for why problem solving is [00:37:00] problem solving and why it's the right thing. Mm-hmm. Because for us, that wasn't an option because at the start of this work, we did all of the checks on the scrap yards and couldn't find anything. And that doesn't, that doesn't mean to say that some weren't a problem don't get me wrong completely, but what the intel was.

Pointing us towards was organized criminals coming from much further afield across the country. That was the consistent thing we were thinking. And I remember during COVID being sat in my bedroom with a laptop thinking, how on earth am I gonna be able to influence their behavior when they're getting all of these and then driving for two hours, three hours, four hours in a different direction, into a completely another jurisdiction.

People were shipping them out of the country in ports and again. We didn't have any ports, so in our force, so I was thinking again, what is actually within my locus of control? What do I have actual opportunity to influence here? Do I put all my eggs in the, let's try and legislate [00:38:00] change through the governance and say they need to do recording of scrap, scrap yards, et cetera in a different way.

Do I need to work with other agencies at ports to try and influence it? And do I think that would make a meaningful difference to the people in my county that I'm responsible for, for tackling it? No, I don't think it would've made very much difference at all. And the beauty, again, was added that when we went to the, the Goldstein Awards as a finalist with this project, someone came up to me after the project and they said after the presentation and they said, oh, that was great.

, Thanks for doing that. He said. We did something completely different. Mm-hmm. They said we had a local problem whereby offenders were stealing the grinders. The angle grinders from shops. And then committing the ly converter effects. So they said, well, what we did was worked with the shops that were selling the angle grinders to put them in certain places and put target hardening measures around them to make them harder for them to steal.

And I thought that is just perfect. I love the fact that you've [00:39:00] done that and you've told me that because that is what this is all about. That is saying what is your specific problem that you are seeing? If you are working in an area where there's a port and you think 90% of them are being shipped out via the port and that's the main reason they're doing them in that area, then you bloody well target the port.

If you, if, if you've got this angle grinder problem like they're describing and that is accessible to you to be able to influence the, the mo of the offense from even before they've committed the offense, how they get the tool and you can influence that, then you go and do that. That just wasn't the position that we were in, which is why we went down the route that we went down because that was something that was in our reach that we could actually influence.

Jason: Yeah, well it, it comes down to the understanding the complete process, and that's when you get into the data and start understanding the, the parts. Of the process that aren't in the data. So just as you mentioned there [00:40:00] that, okay, , how are they stealing this? Okay. What tools are they using?

Where are they getting the tools? Okay. Or what are they doing with it once they have the catalytic converter? That's not gonna show up on any really police report, but that's something where you have to understand the different parts to the timeline, the process from beginning to end and be able to target a that point in the process.

What's the biggest bang for your books, so to speak? Right? In terms, yeah. Completely of, of that, to disrupt that. And then there's probably terms for all this that I'm not using, but that's, that's just kind of where my head is going.

Matt: It's like the dom, it's like a domino effect. Where can you take one of the dominoes out so that they don't knock, don't knock the rest of them over in terms of where their, where is their opportunity.

And I think that's why. One of the most common things, actually, just kind of on that theme is that, and thinking about opportunity, one of the most common issue issues I say is it's not an issue as such. It's, [00:41:00] I used to, I made the mistake for many years until I clocked the difference about root causes versus underlying causes.

So everyone always talks about root causes, right? It sounds right. Why wouldn't we go after the root causes? It sounds wrong to say anything else that's that that's more meaningful, isn't it? To go after the root cause of the problem. Why wouldn't you go after the root cause of the problem?

But in the context of heart, really we are talking about underlying causes, not root causes, because the root causes of problems are inevitably things like. Poverty things hundreds of years in the making. Sometimes generational factors, things that are gonna cost millions or billions of pounds and dollars to

try and change that are not within our in our degree to of control or opportunity to change.

So what we are after are the things that contribute to the problem that we can actually make a meaningful change of tomorrow. So, for example, we can, like that example, take away their access to the angle grinders. That doesn't change the, the, the value of the [00:42:00] catalytic converter. It doesn't change the vulnerability of it.

The fact that they will continue to be added to cars, the fact that people will continue to be able to sell them on the, the fact that people continue to be drawn into life of crime otherwise when you're looking at root causes, are we inevitably not for organized criminality trying to stop people from getting involved in cri in criminality as a child.

It's things like that that. The, it often detracts if we just think about root causes, it detracts from the ability that, that, that we can all have on very realistic things that we can change. As I said, tomorrow we can't change exactly the reasons why men are often more violent to towards women, and we see a lot of issues in violence against women and girls.

But what can I do in that bar, in that nightclub where women are being targeted by men? Do a handful of things with the security guard's behavior, with the positioning of the cameras, with the entry policy, with the bar prices, with the ability to take glass outside [00:43:00] afterwards with lots of people lingering outside the bar and not getting in a taxi very quickly afterwards.

So you get more people lingering when they're lingering for a while. They have disagreements and then arguments happen and then fights happen. I can make little changes there. I might not be tackling the root cause of it, but I'm tackling contributory factors that makes the problem worse and they are within my reach and that's, that's the beauty of what this is, is what's within your reach to actually make a meaningful difference.

Steve: Hi, this is Steve French, and I have a little phrase for you to remember. A phrase that stuck with me throughout my time as an analyst is a quote from Sherlock Holmes. When you've eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

Manny: What's going on? Analysts? My name is Manny San Pedro. I'm the technology director for ACA. And here is my public service announcement for

analysts. Don't become overly reliant on Excel. Use it to [00:44:00] analyze and break down your data.

It's a fantastic tool. Fantastic. And it's free as part of the Microsoft office offering, but don't use it as a database. Use a database as a database. Connect to the database with Excel. And then use it for your pivoting, for all your slicing and dicing, even developing your dashboard, but again, don't use Excel for everything because it may not be the best tool for you.

Svetlana: Hi, I'm Svetlana Gubin, Business Analyst from Oakland Police Department. And my advice, don't be afraid to discover something new. Just try, do some small steps, find the people who can support you, and it will help you in a regular life, in your future job, and you will be surprised how more doors will open to

[00:45:00] you.

Jason: So I see here that you and your team were one of the finalists for the Goldstein Awards, and you also won the Neighborhood Tilly Award, which is named after Nick Tilly. And for those that don't know, Nick Tilly is essentially the Herman Goldstein of the uk. Is if correct,

Matt: yes. Yeah. I mean, Nick, Nick is a wonderful guy. Very kind and very generous with his time, like so many people. That's one thing I have to say about the world of pop. There are so many people in it that are just desperate for everyone else to get it to.

, To see what they see. And I think I didn't see it to start off with it takes time obviously, but there's a moment where you start to see, okay, I get the perspective of this. I get why these people are so crazy about this topic that they, that they want everyone else to do it. But, and that's the truth really, is that there are so many people out there, like Nick and I mentioned Adrian and Karen earlier John Eck Julie Wartel, who I know has been a guest on, this podcast.

There are so many people [00:46:00] out there that are willing to give up their time to talk. Just, just to chat about it and say, you know what, what, what are you struggling with at the moment? And give you a different perspective. And I think for me, over the course of the last six years or so, working in specifically within, within pop, that's just been invaluable because quite often it's, it's quite an isolating time when you're sat there mm-hmm.

On your own and you're kind of. Questioning these things again with logic. 'cause you're looking at it thinking, ah, this surely this doesn't make sense why we are doing it like this. Am I the only one thinking this? But often you don't have anyone else to turn to in your organization who is looking at it through the same lens.

So, so many people in that world that that I owe a lot to, even in this kinda short time relatively short time, it doesn't feel like it for me. It feels like it's taken over my life for the last six years and it probably will continue to, but big kudos to, to all of the people within, within this field that continue to drive it.

Yeah.

Jason: So just to you, you eventually move on to. Sure. I, I guess what went into that [00:47:00] decision to change departments?

Matt: So it was purely personal. Yeah. We we moved to the Midlands, which is as, as it sounds, in the middle of the uk. Well played as opposed, as opposed to in the south. We were in the south before my, me and my, my wife.

Not my wife at the time, but my partner at the time. We moved to the Midlands. She was studying her doctorate in clinical psychology. She's now a a clinical psychologist at the University of Leicester. So that's sort of bank smack in the middle of the country. And that's why we moved there.

And I was kind of just looking around. I was still working for, sorry, remotely at that time. And I was looking around for similar, similar jobs and thinking I'm, I'm, I'm not gonna luck out twice and be able to continue this career because it's such a niche field of policing and what am I gonna have to do otherwise?

And I saw the, the problem solving tactical advisor, but actually team manager for the problem solving team appear for warwickshire, which was their, the base was 15 minutes from my home address. Mm-hmm. And it got even stranger when I [00:48:00] emailed them and asked. Could I speak to someone about this?

And they said, oh yeah, here's the chief inspector that's in charge. And I emailed this person and I said, oh, this is where I live. And he said, are you joking? I live there as well. And it turned out if I'd cut down the trees in the back of my garden, in the back of his garden, I could have seen the back of his house.

Nice. So it was, it was kind of just a match made in heaven. It was, you couldn't make it up really to be able to continue working in problem solving, but move up to the next role, if you like, in terms of managing that team, but also be located close to home. I mean if, if I, I may not be a believer, but that might have been the moment someone was looking down.

Jason: Yeah. So, as you mentioned going, getting into that supervisory role, now you are more strategic. In your thought process for problem solving. So talk to us a little bit about some of the things that you implemented and that you, you achieved in this role.

Matt: So I think the main difference really was that [00:49:00] perspective, like I said earlier, around not looking for the single individual plan like I was kind of doing before, and just thinking about what I was doing there.

And then it was thinking more about how do we progress this? So in two, three years time, there is more a structure, it's happening more readily. People are starting plans freely and working on this. So that was my goal really. So it was much more around the kind of recording processes. The coordination of the efforts evaluating plans, making sure that they were, and when I say plans, I mean problem oriented policing plans, problem solving plans, whatever you wanna call them.

Following the R model making sure they were visible making sure that leaders were aware of where the plans were and the progress of those plans. I think I always say that the most meaningful single one thing that I did in that time was create a a rag. Do you have Rag in America?

Jason: Gimme more information.

Matt: Red, amber, green?

Jason: I don't think so. I don't, I don't, [00:50:00] I don't follow it. So in UK

Matt: policing, in UK policing, everything is rag rated basically. In terms of, we, we feel very safe with our rag rating system of to what extent is this risky or a problem? Red, amber, or green. Oh, okay. So, so to be able to rag rate progress of that plan, so not just was it being worked on, I think this is one of the, the little minutiae things that the, the traps that police forces fall into is where they will rag in the uk.

They will rag rate. A plan based on whether or not it's been updated. But that doesn't necessarily mean anything because you could just put one line and you will see it. There'll just be one line saying plan is ongoing, and then suddenly it'll be, ah, this is in the green. This is all good. We don't have to worry about that.

So we would actually, we enacted a manual process whereby we would be reviewing the plans monthly. And feeding into the machine, if you like, to let people know. And there was a then a strategic meeting to be able to highlight which plans were going astray. And we would have our [00:51:00] recommendations there as to why it was going astray and what support was needed.

And it's something as simple and straightforward and, not confusing at all as that, that actually made the most difference because it meant that people knew and, and that they were being checked and there was a level of accountability and it do I wish it was all carrot and no stick?

Yeah. Yeah. I do. And did everyone come straight away with that? No. No, they didn't because they tried to get around it by, by doing, just as I'd said by, by sort of last minute.com, putting putting an update on saying, there you go. I, I've put an update on, we are working on it, but obviously from our point of view.

Putting an update on one day before the deadline, each month wasn't good enough. That wasn't showing progress. So meaningful little things like that made actually a huge difference. But that accountability structure is so important to the longevity of Pop to be able to know. Where the plans are that anyone could pull them up at one moment and have a look at them and audit them and check how they're doing and give recommendations for how to improve it [00:52:00] compared to what a lot of organizations have in the UK where it's a bit more muddled and there is a bit of confusion sometimes around where the plans are or which, which of the latest template, things like that.

You'll go into some forces and this is me generalizing obviously, 'cause there are some forces that are much better at it, but there you'll go into some forces and you'll find six or seven different ways of people recording it. And that's just a minefield. If you are trying to embed this as a concept, you need a degree of consistency.

You don't want them all to look exactly the same. Like there needs to be a degree of flexibility, but it also, you need to, at at the drop of a moment, be able to find where the plans are. Comment on them and be able to see sort of how

they're progressing. So that kind of thing. In terms of the, the, the meeting structures around accountability, making the sure the plans were visible standardizing, training things like that.

I would run a monthly webinar once a month where I would talk about different pro topic, whether that was a specific problem or more things like how [00:53:00] to create surveys, how to use excel better. Things like that, that would actually be meaningfully useful for people.

Jason: Yeah, it's interesting , 'cause what it sounds like now is if we think back of when you first started, you were creating everything and it seems like now. Things are established. The, the, the problem solving process at the department is something well ingrained in just part of the everyday work at the police department.

You have all these, , different programs, projects going on, and it seems to be part of the culture. Is, is that a fair statement?

Matt: I think I'd love to say that that was exactly how it is and, and that everything works perfectly. Would I say that it's, it came on leaps and bounds in that time to somewhere a lot on the journey?

Yes, it definitely did. It didn't get to where I would envisage it ideally getting to, [00:54:00] but that's a long anyone that talks, anyone that you talk to in the problem world, policing world is gonna say we, that's dreamland years down the line where everything systematically works together and everyone gets their role.

But would I say on a small scale, what you've said is accurate compared to where we were? Yes. Because when I came into it, there wasn't any real consistency in, in, in how things were recorded. People thought they were recording it the right way, but when you went and looked at it. There were various issues.

There was, I remember one issue with the fact that with the system, I, as the central person for this, couldn't see any of the plans the way that they were recorded. There was a restriction whereby the people that created the, the database and owned it had had a way of saying, oh no you need to pay more money if you want to open up access to ev, to everyone or for select people to be able to see it.

So that meant it was literally hidden. It was almost like behind a paywall. We couldn't, we couldn't even see it. Even though it was my bread and butter, it was the stuff that I should be reviewing. So that's the kind of standard of where we were. So I suppose if you made that comparison to [00:55:00] where we were and then where we got to, it was a massive change.

But we're always dreaming of these kind of perfect scenarios where everything is working perfectly.

Jason: Yeah. Now the pushback that you get. During your time here, do you feel it's similar to what you hear from other colleagues, or do you feel that some of the pushback, you had at this department was unique to this department?

Matt: I think the more that you talk to people in this world, the more you realize they have the same problems everywhere. Now I'm obviously primarily speaking for the UK here, but I would, I would guess that in America you're gonna see a lot of the similar things. Maybe there'll be nuance differences. So we are talking like, a systematic way of recording it that says this is important and this is how we do it, and we can access and, and, and hold people accountable.

That accountability structure not having that makes it really hard to actually get that buy-in. I, I'd recommend anyone reading up on, on stratify policing, [00:56:00] Rachel Rachel Santos previously, Rachel Boba done a lot of work in that really demonstrates the importance of of accountability.

I think the actual physical pushback. In terms of the literal pushback as opposed to just some of the challenges around the culture is probably again, you're gonna see different things, but, but similar things. So you'll get, for every 10 or 15 officers you get, unfortunately, you'll probably get at least one who wants to sit at the back of the classroom with their, with their hands folded, their arms folded, kind of saying, this isn't real police work.

This is fluffy stuff. We should be out there nicking the baddies. Rather than doing this, prevention side of things, I mean, through. I always allude people back to the, the PAL principles. So, so Robert Pill, who founded the Metropolitan Police Service, so the first police service in the uk.

Mm-hmm. The founding principles not actually written by him. Everyone always quotes, oh, his PAL principles, but they're actually written by a historian, some over a hundred years later summarizing the work that not he,

but his [00:57:00] team had actually written. So I think he was heavily involved, but maybe slightly inaccurate.

In all these years later we say that they were his, but the, one of the principles there, the first one is just to pro the goal of policing is to prevent crime and mm-hmm. And the other most important one is the measure of police success is the absence of crime, not the visible evidence. Of police action.

So not how many arrests we make, not how many stop searches we do, but actually the so what afterwards. So I think there's always a good challenge to those people around what policing ought to be about. But you always get that, there's always that underlying tone of, no, that's not why I signed up. Lots of lots of cops signed up because they want to catch a burglar at two o'clock in the morning coming out the back of someone's house.

That that's why, that's why they want to do it. So they need to be kind of won over by the leadership. And the leadership needs to be able to sing, sing the right hymn, hymn and theme around around problem solving and, and prevention. I think a lot of forces say the right things around prevention first.

I think not as many forces. Are actually truly [00:58:00] prevention first. I think if you were to look at training, for example, and, and, and compare how much training is put into, say, investigation standards compared to prevention. I mean, there's just no comparison. Sometimes enforce prevention will have a warning with, with new officers there'll be an occasional hour here and an hour there.

Again, that's gonna vary heavily depending on. Who, which force it is and, and who the leader is. And some leaders that have risen through the ranks that have done pop and get it and see the value in it have such amazing success in their forces. And then sadly they leave and, and then your new leadership comes in and, and changes everything.

So I think culture is, culture is a huge thing. There's, there's many elements to it. The reactive, the enforcements, the, the, how you measure success, like I said, around the measure of police success. But it also allows people to have the capacity and the resourcing to be able to do this, to, to, to be able to have the time.

That's one of the most common things we hear about the, is the, the, there's not enough time [00:59:00] to do this work or support from analysts really. Analysts are absolutely essential to this work. And, and that e even though it's obvious to, to an outsider who, so I guess to yourself does, it seems obvious, I

would imagine that analysts are, are kind of core to the role of problem solving and problem with policing.

But inside, at least within many police forces in the uk that doesn't seem quite as apparent. Like it, the analysis gets put back on the officers all the time. The whole responsibility of the plan ends up sitting with one officer. That's not the way to do problem oriented policing, really.

Jason: I, and we talked a little bit about this yesterday in the prep call.

I, I think one of the issues with problem oriented policing is that it can be too complicated. Mm-hmm. It can get bogged down into the idea of having everything be [01:00:00] test, have everything, be documented, have it, it's can be very tedious. Mm-hmm. And it gets into more of the academic, project, if you will, as opposed to a department project.

And I, I do believe that there's analysts at police departments that if you ask them if they want to be part of that, they're like, no, I, I rather, I'd rather go do tactical analysis or intelligence analysis or even data analysis. . They're not signing up to do this academic.

Type project. So it doesn't surprise me that you have a scenario where there's analysts pushing it off of their desk onto somebody else's.

Matt: I think I, I think that's for most of the analysts that I've worked with, where they've kind of had that light bulb moment, they do get past that and they [01:01:00] see the, the benefits of it.

I, I get what you mean is that it's what we call the is it sexy enough? Mm-hmm. Saying, oh, I've prevented this much crime. Is that as sexy as, as being able to say, we arrested this person? Sure. And, and having that drive of we got them that moment where they come in and, and there's that kind of conclusion

Jason: mm-hmm.

To an

Matt: investigation. It's, it's often open-ended problem solving. We've prevented it a bit, well, when do we stop? When do we not? That kind of thing. I think you're probably, you're right around the, the academic thing, I think. Some, some perspectives can take it too far that way and it makes it inaccessible

to people that we get caught up in, like you say, in everything being absolutely perfect.

I think the other thing to really think about from an analyst's perspective is seeing their role as a part of the core team. What I see quite often when analysts are asked to support with problem solving in the UK is that they're an external resource. They're somewhat sat at headquarters or inevitably working from home now, but, but, but [01:02:00] not based in the local teams where the, where the other, the rest of the people working on this problem are and potentially the partner agencies as well.

In, in, in areas where they work closely together. They're separate. They get requested via an email, potentially to their supervisor that gets passed down. They don't have necessarily any contacts. Sometimes with the officer doing the work. Who's gonna do the interventions? They get asked. Something quite broad and vague around this problem.

Could you do some analysis, whatever that is some wizardry around the data. Can you create some of those nice shiny maps and and tables and graphs and things that you've done before? They put this document together, they send it on, and guess what? They never hear anything back. They get no feedback.

They don't know whether it was helpful or not, and then they can't improve on the future. And, and, and if I did that, would I want to do that again every time? No. I think that's horrible. Mm-hmm. I'd be like, why are you asking me to keep doing this stuff? I don't know whether it's any good [01:03:00] or not. Is it helping at all?

Whereas actually the, the kind of the vision of what this is, is the analyst is part of the team. They are part of the team around that problem. They have a pivotal role and they need to work with the officers and the partners collectively, not this external resource and. To see their suggestions and their interventions actually implemented, I think would be so much more rewarding than, than, than often is the case at the moment where for many analysts, and again I'm generalizing here mm-hmm.

To what I've seen, I see many analysts will not put recommendations on their work in terms of interventions, or if they do, it's an extra because they've been told they have to put something in or it, it looks good to put something in. And when we do that, it's inevitably very generic. So it's sort of an, because it's an extra to have, because they have no confidence necessarily these things are gonna be implemented because they haven't got they haven't got some tangible

evidence of that happening before where they've worked that closely [01:04:00] with the team and they've seen it implemented their own ideas.

So they, they chuck it on, you'll see your patrol do some targeted patrols do some engagement, have some multi-agency partnership meetings, CCTV and lighting will be the kind of classics that, that we see time and time again, whereas actually. What I wanna see is I wanna see the handful of.

Tailored interventions that only the analysts could have found. The only analysts through reading through meticulously all of those previous crimes and calls and studying them in, in great depth could have picked out because they have a different understanding of the problem. And, and, and they're normally the person that I want to know the interventions of from the most out of all of the people involved.

It's the analyst who spent time working on that because they've spent the last two weeks pouring over these individual crimes. They know them off the back of their hand. They need, it's a classic one. Every analyst back in the day was kind of as, from what I'm told, was trained in it, but it doesn't happen as readily as it, as it should happen visiting the [01:05:00] locations at the time with the rest of the team, walking that location, having read through some of the crimes to, to make sure it's targeted, that that just as a one-off side thing is something.

I see so often people are so desperate when they, when they get trained in this to say, oh yes, we should do a site visit, we should do a walk around. They jumped. Speak first, straight in and say, let's go and do the work. Walk around and I'm saying, hold up just a second. Can we have a bit of a look at the data first before we just end up focusing on that alley that everyone's obsessed around this alley and you raised the question.

Is, has any crime actually happened down this alley? And we go, oh, we don't know. But it looked bad didn't it? It looked dingy, so that's why we're focused on it. But yeah, the role, the role that analysts can, can play is huge. And I think it's the, the experience of, of doing it in a good environment.

I think one of the barriers and opportunities that Aiden SIBO and colleagues raised in, in their bit of work around England and Wales, police forces and the barriers to pop one of the, well, one of the selling points they said was that it was [01:06:00] morale boosting for officers. And I think it definitely has the potential to be, but I think it also has the potential to be the opposite, like you've kind of described.

Mm-hmm. That actually, if you continue down that path of not resourcing it, not not supporting it and just playing at it or like in the case of the analyst there. Being requested to do something, but not really feeling part of the team and not being able to see their interventions, their ideas come to life.

Then I think it, it doesn't just have a, a, a neutral effect. I think it would have a negative effect and actually reduce morale and, and reduce people's likelihood to want to do pot because inevitably they'd think, well, what a load of rubbish.

Jason: Yeah. Well, I, I think too, it's the difference of being asking them for input versus telling them to do it right.

Yeah. And that's the attitude of both of those scenarios is gonna be quite different if, if they have the input, if they feel like they're part of the process, they are going to. Want to understand and have [01:07:00] the understanding and fill it out more accurately than somebody who just was told, Hey, we got this.

We have to fill this out. Just checking the box. Like you were just Yeah. What you were talking about before. Exactly.

Matt: Exactly.

Jason: So, all right, well, let's finish up. You as, I mentioned in your intro, you recently started out at the Cambridge Center of Evidence-Based Policing, and you now you're at a consultant and you are overseeing projects over several different police forces.

Matt: Yeah, I think I, I mean, I was, I was kind of desperate for an opportunity like this, to be honest, to, to be able to kind of expand a bit more. I think when you work in one police force, it can feel a bit restrictive when you, if you don't get the buy-in immediately that you, that you want.

And that can be really hard. Like we've talked about some of the barriers and the culture. So to be able to work for the Cambridge Center for Evidence-based policing and, and work with 43 potentially different forces as well as central policing bodies, like we have the College of Policing over here [01:08:00] and also like the government's home office and then also international forces that we've worked with as well.

There's so much more opportunity, which I, I really value whether it's, whether it's like training auditing forces on pop supporting forces to do problem solving.

So actually getting hands on. Recently I've been working through the home office with, with a force creating pop plans and that involved.

Sitting down with the analyst, talking them through their comparative case analysis, how I would write it from a problem solving perspective. Going out with them and the wider teams, visiting locations, running workshops with them, getting out as much information about the problems as possible. So I think being able to still do the frontline problem solving work and support it whilst also doing the training and the wider embedding is kind of the dream job for me, if you like getting to do all of those things as well with forces that, that really want your support because they're the forces that are saying we've got a little pocket of funding here.

What help can you give us? We are desperate to kind of have some help, which is, which is really rewarding and I think leans back to that, that analytical [01:09:00] point we were making around the analyst and the role and the value of the analyst. Them actually being really wanted and just as you said, bringing them in and saying.

What's your perspective on this? What would you do differently rather than that tick box where maybe they're just asked to, contribute something so that we can say, oh yes, well we did that. So that's the kind of place I'm in at the moment. It, it gives me a lot of variety, which I, I really enjoy and get to work with so many different forces and different problems as well.

So one minute you work on knife crime, another one, antisocial behavior and disorder in the nighttime economy or an organized crime. It's it's a really varied role, which which I really value at the moment.

Jason: So let's have a, let's do a what if scenario and what if you , got a position or going next level now.

And you were put in charge and of implementing problem oriented policing to the 43 jurisdictions that you described earlier. Mm-hmm. Have you thought about [01:10:00] what are some things you would implement in that role?

Matt: I think standardizing some of the basic things across 43 forces would make a huge difference whereby.

You go into each of the forces and everyone does it a little bit different. And some of them, you talk to some of 'em and say, oh, we got this from this force. Whether it's a training package or a template, the recording system, a way of

evaluating the plans, whatever it was, they're always borrowing it from someone else, but they don't know whether the thing they're borrowing is actually any good or not.

They are, they, it just, it looked good and they didn't have many other options because they didn't know who else to approach. You've got some forces that are doing excellent work and I think too often we see across, and this is again coming back to that same point around the number of forces, obviously the comparison, but we see so many different ways of doing the same thing.

I think creating some, . PR codes of practice that, and practical things that people could do, [01:11:00] not just guidelines around what good looks like you should have these sorts of roles or it would be good to have a training package and these sorts of things. I want tactical, tangible things across the 43 forces that we can evidence a good and we can then go into each of the forces and test them to see whether they're working or not, and then change them and learn together across 43 forces.

So I'm talking as I said, the template and the recording structure. Which roles are more valuable? The meeting in terms of to have, if you're gonna have a limited number of supporting roles, whether that's analyst advisors, so on and so forth. The leadership level where it ought to sit at again, you'll get sometimes an inspector will own problem solving.

You'll get another times when it's the, the a ccc. So it's sort of like. Second, third in command, maybe of the force. It really varies. There's so much there across training that varies as well. And, and the College of Policing is doing in, in the UK is doing some work to try and to try and standardize that, at least for neighborhood policing.

But, but there's a broader, work to be done. So I think the first [01:12:00] thing I would do is try to standardize some of the, the basic things and get the basics right because rather than trying to run before you can walk, I think there are a lot of the basics that would elevate everyone up a bit. And I think that's that beautiful sweet spot that forces need to not aim for, but.

Start to progress towards, whereby sometimes we come in and say, everything's gotta be perfect. These, this is a great example. One, you're doing more of these ones, rather than trying to say, well look, can we start doing the basics right? Consistently, can every problem have at least one baseline measure?

Please? Can it be routinely monitored? Is there some evidence of analytical work taking place? Are the responses actually evidence-based? All of these things that aren't necessarily going to the nth degree, like where you described around it feeling too academic. But if you do some of the basics right, if we can start to then reach those points afterwards.

So I think standardizing some kind of expectations around, around what force, what looks [01:13:00] good, really.

Jason: Yeah. Well . You're still young, yet you have time. And someone would

Matt: have to create the role first.

Jason: Yeah. And well, and then hey, you'll do so many great things that they'll create, an award, the sessions award.

Right. And just like we were talking a little bit Yeah. About yesterday is the, the, the department that. Has most integrated problem oriented policing in the department. Right? Yeah. I

Matt: think that that would be huge. I think we look at single plans. That's how we measure success. We the convert example.

Now I can't, I can't for a second stand here and say. Oh, well, we shouldn't do that. And I would just obliterate my career that I wouldn't be able to springboard off of that. I'm not, I'm not interested in self-sabotage that much, but obviously it's incredibly important. We keep that towards the Tilly Awards, the gold season.

We keep championing those individual successes a hundred percent. But that extra bit, it's potentially looking beyond the single individual sparks of brilliance and in innovation that we see across time and time again [01:14:00] each year with people putting forward their projects, but instead. As you say, who is embedding it?

Who's gone from being the bottom of the list, if you like, in terms of forces and really struggling with this. And they don't have any recording process and no one's doing it to, they might not be the best and they might not have the overall single plan, but by God they've got 30 plans in their force and they're all at least average.

I know that sounds really depressing. They're all least average. So there's a minimum standard. We've got a load that are good and the ones that are average, guess what? They're all taking learning. They, they, they've realized where they went wrong and how they're gonna improve it next time. And we start to see that improvement.

The officer that owned this one did an average one to start off with, but now you can look at the next one they've done and look, it's getting better. That kind of evidence. To embedding it, to changing the culture, to changing the infrastructure that that enables this to happen is worth its weight in gold.

And it's worth so much more than one single plan, which, as, as I say, should still be rewarded. But [01:15:00] I think that's, that's the goal. That's what every force should be looking for. Not just those one-off plans, but but systematically embedding it.

Jason: Yeah,. It's a good pitch. We gotta, cut out that part about average.

It can't be the mid award. I don't wanna

Matt: say we're not aiming for that, but I can tell you if everyone was like, all of our plans are at least 50 quality 50% and above, they'd, everyone would bite your hand off for that. As long as there's a few good ones in there. As long as we don't just accept that everyone can be 50%.

So

Jason: here's a more philosophical question for you, and it's probably a very meaty question, but problem solving, should it be a police department endeavor or should it be more of a citywide endeavor? So it's not necessarily just the police department taking on this problem solving role.

It is the entire city, the entire community taking on this [01:16:00] role.

Matt: I mean, it's certainly the vision of even when it was proposed, that was kind of the vision. But I think that the turnoff that you're kind of alluding to is the fact that it's problem oriented policing, but mm-hmm. You see many people historically refer to it as problem oriented partnerships, and that was one, one person that as an ex colleague, I think six months ago, said, why don't we call it problem oriented partnerships?

I can't get buy-in from the partners because we keep calling this police thing. I think there's nothing to stop us completely changing it and say. It's problem oriented partnerships because that's partnerships are ingrained in it. And they don't work very well. The plans often without it even for my LY one, obviously we were heavily police led because of the nature of the crime.

It was very crimey. It wasn't a problem that was sort of you, you know what I mean? It wasn't sort of blurring the lines between all our organizations. We were clearly going to be the lead. But even in, in that, we still acquired data and got buy-in and they helped with the interventions, [01:17:00] various partners, even though it was very crime focused.

Other, other work, some work I've done recently with the force around robberies. Basically every intervention we proposed was not owned by the police. That wasn't on purpose. I wasn't trying to to move responsibility away from police, but it was just inevitable that when you open your mind up to the opportunities of, of preventing crime, there's any one of countless opportunities.

And, and often very , few of them feel police and, and that really is how it should be. And I think maybe as you kind of alluded to, I think. , We involve partnerships to different degrees, at least in, in the UK fairly well. Whether or not there is ingrained within individual plans as as much as we would like is another question I'd say.

But we definitely involve partners fairly well. I would say across the board. What we probably do less well is involve the community. I think we do problem solving to the community more often. Again [01:18:00] separate case studies can, will, will deviate from that of course. But I think by and large we see us as the, we are the doers and the community.

We know what's best interest of the community and in actual fact, sometimes we miss some key bits of information and we miss some opportunities and we sometimes make things worse occasionally as well. So I think involving the community a bit more, and I think I, I think the question would be. To put back to you, I guess, where would it then sit strategically in terms of ownership and I guess that would come down to every jurisdiction that is probably set up in a slightly different way, but maybe starting to take some of the ownership away from policing and seeing policing as a role within that would, would be the first step.

And I often say to partners who come on training alongside their police colleagues that I run, I say, you guys are armed. They say, how, how can we do

this? This is a even though you've explained to us, it still feels heavily police and we're relying on the police here. Mm-hmm. Said the language now Sarah [01:19:00] pop.

Underlying causes baseline measures evaluations and control groups and all of these things that we're talking about, right? You can use that to your advantage. So when you go back to your partnership meetings, which happen mostly monthly in the uk, you can start using that language now, people that haven't been on this course, inspectors on that will start looking around going, hang on a minute.

I'm getting internal people saying, where are your problem solving plans? Your scanning's not good enough. You need to be doing more of this, and more of that. But now the partners are talking about it, they understand this, they understand this better than I do. God, I better make sure that we're in tip top condition, because I can't have everyone from all sides seemingly knowing about this.

So maybe that's not the ideal way that we'd like people to come along in terms of, like I'm saying with the carrot and the stick. But you've gotta take every opportunity, and I think it's definitely an opportunity around partnerships.

Jason: All right. Very good. Let's move on to our advice section. So analysts hearing this what advice do you have?

For them.

Matt: I think the main thing is to be inquisitive is to not take anything as, as [01:20:00] gospel truth. Data quality as you've alluded to and, and, and making sure it's, it's viable to use. It's, it's notoriously tricky in policing.

I think the main thing. Is to go beyond descriptives. It's the critical thinking element that makes problem analysis. What it is. It's, it's going beyond just saying, okay, they would like some information around victims offenders locations. So on, here are all the percentages this is the ethnicity of suspects, the percentage of them that were this.

Mm-hmm. The, the temporal analysis, this is when that happened, but actually putting these things together to kind of make sense of it is, what this is all about. I, I did, and again, another example recently whereby a victim had gone into a shop asking to borrow a phone because they had just been a victim of crime and their phone had been stolen and the shop refused them.

They said, no, not interested in getting involved. That one off incident doesn't necessarily mean much on its own, but to me, that jumped out as being okay. That tells me that maybe people, maybe [01:21:00] people in this area, businesses are not being those capable guardians. They're not necessarily helping people. If they're not gonna help victims, then they're most certainly not going to be doing anything at the time of an offense to be able to prevent this from happening and become those active capable guardians.

So I would then be inquisitive as an analyst. I would ask the questions to say, what else would I need to see in the data? To be able to sort of fulfill that hypothesis that I think there's a lack of capable guardianship. So you can start to kind of brainstorm, for lack of a better phrase, different ways of of, of, of testing that.

So whether for us that was things like how many of the crimes have witness statements on them. If I could work that out as a percentage, that alone isn't going to tell me about capable guardianship. But it contributes to my understanding because I would be expecting if there were no capable guardians and people weren't supportive of prosecutions and supporting victims, that I would see a lack of witness statements.

What are there examples and case studies and members of the public intervening or supporting victims when incidents [01:22:00] happen, what's the time between offense time and reported time for when phones are stolen? If the time is. Massive, the gap that tells me no one is providing their phone. No one's seeing this happening and going, oh, you've had your phone stolen.

Do you wanna borrow my phone and call the police? That's never happening. So all of those things on their own wouldn't tell me much about the problem, but combined, they would create this picture, this understanding of that critical thinking of how does this data all come together and tell me something about the story and tell me why this crime is, is being allowed to occur.

And, and if it does, then you can start coming up with your interventions and you can recommend those interventions based on saying, well, okay, what things would we be doing differently to enable those people in that location when those thefts and robberies are happening to become active capable guardians, whether they're members of the public or they're people working in the businesses.

So to move beyond those descriptive or those one-liners, for example, saying there was one [01:23:00] incident where this happened. I don't care too much

about one incident. That's not the the pattern that I'm looking for. I'm looking about how. The story comes together across all these incidents. Where are the patterns between them for opportunity?

And probably the last thing I'd say is. Hypothesis testing.

So turning assumptions into testable hypotheses. And by that, it doesn't need to be sort of, as we said earlier, statistical analysis, but like I said earlier with the, the example around someone refusing their phone, that gives me an idea about what I think's going on. And I say, what else do I need to see in the data?

Or by visiting a location, engaging with partners to make me feel more confident about this particular hypothesis. And the best way of doing that is collaborating with the officers. Because officers involved in these problems who are walking these areas day in day out, experiencing these problems will have loads of knowledge and understanding about those problems.

But inevitably some of those things might be assumptions because we haven't got an evidence basis for them. So I find that's a really great [01:24:00] way to merge officers and analysts together as part of that team to take the local understanding and perspective of the officers and turn those things into hypothesis to say, okay, we think that, and what do I as an analyst need to see in the data?

How can I help for us to be confident of that? So I think that's the best way of kind of merging it together.

Jason: And for the listeners, we will put links to additional information on all the topics that we talked about here today. And if you have questions for Matt, we will leave a way to contact Matt as well.

Alright, Matt, let's finish up with personal interests and you enjoy cricket.

Matt: Yes. And I know that might mean nothing to American listeners. It's one of the biggest sports in the world. I have, you know?

Jason: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, so is football AKA soccer? But Americans don't seem to be impressed by that much either, although it's getting better.

Matt: No, but I, no. Do you know what USA actually had a, a team at [01:25:00] the last, the 2020, which is a format of cricket. So there are different, different types of waves. We play cricket. They had a, they had a team at the,

the last World Cup of that, and I believe they beat Pakistan, which was a, I think I, I might be corrected now by someone.

I feel like they beat someone big. And it was a bit of a coup. So there's definitely something to latch onto maybe for, for American listeners there.

Jason: Yeah. Yeah. I, I have talked to several people that, I say several. That's not a, that's not accurate. I've talked to a couple people that have, that have played it and explained it to me, and they said , you just have to watch it.

Yeah. I have to someone's gotta coach you through exactly what happens when, and then you, get a way better understanding of, the process.

Matt: But I think it's the moment then that they tell you the, one of the best formats of the game is five days solid of playing that everyone normally just switches up.

But that is the best bit. It is the ebb and flow. It's like watching chess. It's [01:26:00] like the strategic maneuvers of, of five days. One that you think one team's on top and then, and then, and then three days later they're not.

Jason: Yeah, yeah. Oh, man. Yeah. It goes on for days. . And then who's, who's your football team?

Matt: Westham United, so East London. My family's from originally from, from the east end of London. So we are, they're kind of having a terrible time of it now, so I'm not really, I'm not really wanting to talk about it. We're not, we're not doing so well. But we actually, a couple of years ago won the first trophy ever of my lifetime.

So at least we've got something to something to write at home about. But to, to be honest, when we were talking yesterday about our interest and things like that, that we might discuss, and I was kind of just thinking, I was reminiscing of all of the things that I used to love doing before I had a 3-year-old child.

Really? Yeah. And, if my son, it becomes an analyst in 20 years and it somehow digs this podcast out. I, I still love you. And, and definitely. I don't regret all of these things. Trading them in playing cricket, going to festivals and gigs. [01:27:00] My my season ticket watching Westham playing playing in a band, things like that, that all feel like very distant memories now.

Now I, now it's ha having, having a 3-year-old and. Just thinking about problem solving all the time, which, which is which drives my life, which I, I definitely need at least, this is maybe a bit of a wake up call have, having to think about what my interests are is a wake up call to definitely create some more than just indoor cycling.

Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Jason: All right, Matt, it is been a pleasure talking with you today. Our last segment to the show is Words to the World, and this is where you can promote any idea that you wish. What are your words to the world?

Matt: I think it's kind of slightly cliche, but I think you you asked words for words for the world.

Jason, you're gonna get something cliche. I think be curious about everything. If you are, whether this is in the real world, if you like out or the real world, the world outside of analysis or not, be curious about everything. Ask why to everything. Question. It. Don't take everything [01:28:00] at at face value.

If something in your spreadsheet looks wrong or doesn't quite add up, don't bury your head in the sand. But go and find out. It's the only way that you'll find find the accuracy and find the truth. And, and if you wanna go further, specifically thinking about problem or policing, you need analysts. You need analysts to understand problem analysis.

You need to get 'em to realize the crucial role that they play because without them , we're just playing at this really.

Jason: Very good. Well, I leave ever guess with, you've given me just enough to talk bad about you later.

Matt: Thanks very much, Jason. But I do appreciate you being on the show. Thank you so

Jason: much.

And you be safe. Cheers. You too.

Thank

Mindy: you for making it to the end of another episode of Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. You can show your support by sharing this in other episodes found on our website@www.leapodcasts.com. If you have a topic you would like us to cover or have a suggestion for our next guest, please send us an email at Elliot podcasts@gmail.com.

Till next time, analysts, keep talking.