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Capgemini

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[00:00:00] Wasn't too bad at all. And then I've got a C on the, on the, on the Elizabeth van actually did. Somebody came out for you. They looked, you went. That man needs a C. Some old woman. Some old pregnant woman. Yeah.

Welcome to Cloud Realities an original podcast from Capgemini and this week a conversation show about experience and digitalization. However, we're gonna look at that [00:00:30] from the incredibly complex world of defence. I'm Dave Chapman. I'm Esmee van de Giessen and I'm Rob Kernahan. And I'm delighted to say that joining us today is Ben Sparke, the Enterprise Azure Cloud and AI specialist for UK Defence at Microsoft.

Ben, how are you doing? Good. How are you? Uh, very well, thanks. Thank you so much for joining us. I thank you. We are very much looking forward to hearing your stories today and, and giving us some insight into a very different world. Yeah. Really excited to be on the show. Wonderful. [00:01:00] Now Robin here. How you doing?

Hello. You all right? We're here. We're back. We're actually in person. Yeah, I know. Face to face, it weird. Makes a nice change, doesn't it? It does. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, it does. You, you're in 3D Dave, which is always a bit shocking. Vivid five. Vivid, vivid. I like to call it vivid, intense, vivid. How, how, how's your week been?

Uh, well, um, not so much fun. On travel and transport, a journey that should have taken me two hours, took five and a half. I was happy at the end. Did having all of your documentation [00:01:30] printed out help you with that? It did. It did. I was able to grip it when I was angry about things getting canceled and nothing working.

Yeah. Like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Shooing, how are you doing as you Right. Well, good. And I have to admit, I actually bought a laser jet printer. Oh. You see, I mean, this doesn't feel like it's the Exactly. Printing things, the space out. Yes. Printing things out. Yeah. So, but was it one of those purchases that when you got it was like weirdly satisfying?

Yes, because I first had another very expensive other [00:02:00] printer, which was not a laser. You probably know bubble jet was it? It was useless. And there are, yeah, the black wasn't working even though it was loads of, loads of things in it. So I was so frustrated. Has anybody had a bubble jet printer that ever works beyond the first page that's ever printed out?

You don't think that's the business model where they, they break really quickly? One, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And we call Rob LaserJet once in a while. Yeah. LaserJet. I bought a Rob. Uh, just for the record, I refuse to call Rob LaserJet. That sounds a bit cool, [00:02:30] doesn't it, David? And that's your, uh, objection. I can't, it, I just simply cant buy into it.

Can't nickname That makes him sound dynamic. You see him with a cap? No, no, no, no, no, no. So whilst we're on technological things, Robert, and things being a little confusing. What has been confusing you this week, right Dave? It's a big one this week. Existential in nature, brace yourself, bent, brace yourself.

Existential in nature. I heard, right? Digital twins. And we've talked a little bit on the show about creating a digital twin of yourself, a human. Mm-hmm. It's five years time. Yeah. We're able to accurate recreate you as a [00:03:00] digital twin. Okay. Would you allow that, um, would it be acceptable to have that posthumously represent you in court?

Oh, I see. In court. Yeah. So, so it's such a good twin. That it can testify on your behalf posthumously. How would you feel about that? It's very accurate. It's very good five years time, but when there's problems that need to get solved that, 'cause I'm like, would you want to do that thought be useful? You were going useful.

I thought you were gonna go down the road of like two pack holograms or something like that with this. No, no, no. Like literally, is it, [00:03:30] can it legally represent you when you are not there? Who owns my digital twin at this point? Mm. Well, it's, it's independent. It's you, so you'd have to have somebody who runs it for you independently.

Mm-hmm. But it's you and you, you are a digital being that can survive after. So I need to explore the ecosystem of how the digital twin thing happened. Well, you, what's the infrastructure? Well, it's, well, I dunno what the infrastructure is. It's five, 10 years time. It runs on something that you've paid for so you can be represented, or indeed the state can use to bring you back and say, we need to ask you a question.

Oh, I see what you're [00:04:00] saying. Yeah, so like the di? Like the di. So I've gone to the digital twin company and allowed them to make a digital twin of me. Yes. How do I know they're not going to like put adverts in the middle of it? Halfway through your response, you have to start referring to some coffee company.

I always did enjoy drinking their coffee. Yeah, exactly. I didn't even like that coffee, so everybody that knew me would know that I didn't like instant coffee. There's loads of uses to it. So your family could ask you questions about your [00:04:30] life experiences and things like this. Mm-hmm. Continue to interact with you, or if something needs to be tied up legally around your estate or something like that, yeah.

You could be there. I mean, there's lots of useless, but do you want to be represented in that way? This is the confusion. 'cause it could be very useful. Yeah. And it's likely that technology will get to a point where it probably can, if you have enough experience behind the individuals. It feels to me like.

The commercialization of something like that Could be, there could be hi jinks involved in it. Yeah, potentially. You'd have to, [00:05:00] you'd have to really trust the organization. Think would think to be, I think it would have to be governmental, wouldn't it? Yeah. Yeah. It'd have to be something like that where you have a digital version of yourself and the government regulate it so it's not corrupted, et cetera.

Yeah, but you'd have to trust the government as well though, don't you? On the emotional side, I would wonder if I would not, luckily my dad's still alive, but if he would pass away, I would love, but I was wondering would it also type with two fingers? 'cause my dad still types two. Two fingers. I guess it would have to, wouldn't it?

But I mean, if it didn't, it wouldn't be. [00:05:30] Representative, would it? Well then what is the digital twin? Is it purely, is it like words? Is it, is it a robot? Is it a robot? And, and here we are getting into the confusion. Yes. Fire up a little disc you put on the table. There's Dave Chapman. We can talk him, uh, we can talk to him and ask him questions.

Would it be like, um, like, you know, in, uh, star Wars and you've got the little hologram Yeah. Things, the, the little hollow desk. You could carry a Dave Chapman around who's in your pocket? Wouldn't want that, Rob. I mean, exactly. I mean, I mean that is, that's what you, that's where you're really going with this.

Yeah. I just want a little you image. [00:06:00] Okay. Oh my. Let's not on that note. Say. Very well done, Rob.

Alright, Ben, let's get into it. You've had a bit of a storied history, so why don't you wind us back and tell us how you ended up in cloud at Microsoft? Yeah, it's uh. It's quite a, quite a strange journey and I bes I guess, a lot of serendipity to it. Mm. Um, a lot of things. I was just very lucky to be in the position.[00:06:30]

Uh, I was in, I guess I started off, I did war studies at university, right. So I didn't come from a technical background. And then I joined the military primarily. I started in the infantry, so I was armored in, uh, warrior fighting vehicles, I think in the other hall. And then I moved into the Rangers and it was actually through the Rangers.

I then moved into an intelligence role. Right. And once I joined that intelligence role, I started to get a lot more access to information. I started to use a lot [00:07:00] more IT systems. Right. 'cause right in in your day job at the time sort of thing. Yeah. Yeah. And actually I started working with a small company, um, that ran an open source intelligence, uh, service.

Mm-hmm. And I started to. Furnish that to my, um, the various other intelligence analysts I, I ran and they started deploying with this technology. And for me it was just the fact that through an application on their phone, I could give them a resource that I couldn't furnish with human beings. Right. So we went [00:07:30] from a situation where you, the whole point of rangers was to deploy British troops in.

Further afield locations in higher risk areas. Mm. But we didn't have tons and tons of resource that you'd get in a sort of normal brigade or division. Mm. So to, to give somebody an application that could, uh, for instance, I mean this was like live updates. So it was using, um, sort of internet scraping to go Okay, ahead of you.

There's a barrier, there's, um, a protest, something like [00:08:00] that. Right. And people using it. On deployments, deploy. And I found that really powerful. I then decided, uh, I wanted to leave the military and I started looking at how I could, how I could sort of expand this interest that I've sort of generated. I started, and actually just through the military network, it's, that's, I think what's really powerful about leaving the military is that you have this incredible landscape of people that work across all sorts of industries and have.

I mean, [00:08:30] primarily the time to speak to you, no matter how important they are. Mm-hmm. And by speaking to them, I decided to, uh, learn a bit about cloud technology. Mm-hmm. Uh, so I started learning, uh, AWS, um, that practitioner. And I then sort of trans, um, sort of moved dogen into Azure. And from there I then sort of started looking at certain companies and eventually found somebody who worked for Microsoft.

Right. Had a chat. And ended up getting an interview. And I think I was also very lucky that the people I came in [00:09:00] contact with at Microsoft mm-hmm. Gave me the time of day they Right. Saw the fact that I wasn't a naturally a natural fit for the role. Yeah, yeah. But I'd come with a lot of experience, um, from this my sort of my sector defense, uh, but also a sort of really, I guess a growth mindset.

Well, I think that one, one of the things that I always think about people who are actively good at transforming things with technology, you don't really start with the technology. You have to have empathy, don't you, with the, [00:09:30] who's the human, the experience at the end. If you understand it and you've done it, then you know what's needed, isn't it?

And sometimes it gets criticized for being, not talking to the business and just creating tech for tech's sake. Right? I suppose in your perspective, you can go, well, I understand what the end user really needs. So let's start with, isn't it? It's about, it's about thinking through, well. What's my experience as an end user in any, in any circumstance, and how can that be better?

I honestly think technology transformation, no matter how big and grand it ultimately gets, and sometimes it [00:10:00] does get big and grand is really, comes down to that, doesn't it? Yeah. Yeah. There's only two things. You, you want an outcome. Or you want an experience. I don't even think in tech as well. I think also in transformation.

Yeah. If you know what it's like to be a team member in a software team, or if you know how to work in customer service. Mm-hmm. And then you step up to the letter of leader, you can step into that mindset like, what would I need? You know, how did managers talk to me about a new change or a transformation?

So it's not [00:10:30] even, I think in tech, but it's also in being. Able to step into someone else's shoes. Yeah. And then that you, you've made an extremely big transition from one world to another world. Yeah. And living in both must help as well. You must see some frustrations on both sides of the fence, I suppose.

Exactly. And I, one big thing I saw was the, when we in, uh, when we created something new, so for instance, during, during. Coronavirus. We brought in an [00:11:00] application that was supposed to get rid of WhatsApp. Mm. Because the, the military was very worried about the fact we were basically organizing our lives on, on this, on that service, and not on a controlled service, but it was the experience of, okay, I need my troops to actually download this.

I need them to have it on, like for, for instance, for this application. They needed it on the entire time. And I was just said to them, A private soldier is not going to do that. And then when I give him an order or I say, be here at this time and he doesn't turn up what [00:11:30] you, there's nothing I can really say to go, it's their fault.

It's actually just we weren't actually thinking about their experience, that soldier's experience and the fact that, you know, I remember setting work for my soldiers and I was like, oh, just go onto your laptop and do this. And he was like, sir, I don't have a laptop. Because he's only got a phone. Um, you know, we weren't provisioning a lot of these things to, to the end user, so it was really difficult to do.

Um, I see. I see. And, and j just let's just go a little bit [00:12:00] deeper on what your day job experiences and is. I mean, for, for a lot of us. Some of the circumstances you find yourself in a, a pretty, a pretty unique and sometimes startling situation. So maybe just maybe just build on it a little bit and just tell us what your day job was at this point and, and how you were trying to think about the soldier experience.

So, I suppose for me, in this job now, one of the principle elements is that I focus on connected devices. Mm-hmm. A lot of what I work on currently [00:12:30] is very focused, or at least that I can talk about, is very focused on more backend, larger services. And so I feel that there can often be a disconnect between how those services are provisioned and how we go from something very far away to that end user.

To that, yeah, to that soldier sort of sailor, et cetera. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And so I think one thing I really want to always bring in is that. Okay, how does this affect that person? How does it affect their families? And all these sort of things that we're [00:13:00] trying to, trying to, um, ultimately deliver to. Um. Right.

Very good. So you must have seen in the time that you have been experiencing that yourself and then specifically now from your sort of perspective, looking back on the industry. Quite a number of shifts in both what defense is trying to do, the, the nature of conflict that defense is involved in, and then the individuals, whether it be soldier or [00:13:30] sailors experience in it, in in your head.

What does that shift look like from a firsthand experience? I feel that it, within the military and technology has gone. More and more it's become democratized. Mm-hmm. So when I first started you had a DII tower, right. And that was pretty much the only bit of it you

touched And what was a DII Tower? Oh, sorry.

Just a standalone computer. Right. So just like used to have at home and that was it. If you logged into it, you no one else could access it. Right. So if my tune [00:14:00] Sergeant logged in. I'd have to, I'd have to call him and say, the computer's locked. I'm gonna pull the plug on it. If you, if you don't get to the office in five minutes.

This is how Robert likes to really home technology. He's like, David, the safest way to stay safe and in, in a cyber world is not plugged into the internet. Notice that, no, but I mean, we talk about world password day must be coming up soon and it's clacking, but the, the, it's the, uh, writing. Password down on a bit of paper and leaving it in a drawer is a bit more secure than sticking it online, isn't it?

[00:14:30] It's like, isn't it? Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Now, I assume you didn't do that. Was the motor everyone's different passwords, password? Um, I won't say there was, but I won't say there wasn't. Um, yeah. And it was, I, it was just something that was there. We, we did some work on it, but it wasn't very central to what we did.

Right, right. Um, for instance, like. The only other technology was Bowman Radio. Mm. Um, and that had a lot of the, the range of it was usually [00:15:00] quite challenged by the terrain we were moving in. We had combat, uh, so that's a, essentially a situational awareness program inside the, the Warrior armored vehicles.

Right. That was very temperamental. Right. And throughout training, we were told. Essentially don't, never, never guarantee access to this. And actually in an actual deployed state, I never had it work, so, oh, no way we had it in trainers. Right. But they would turn it off in the trainers as well, so we would then, so you knew you knew what to do because the thing was so flaky.

Yeah, but I am, you know, just [00:15:30] imagine I go from being able to see various other units to my left and right, um, maybe sort of particular areas on the map my command wants me to focus on. And then suddenly I go back and it's radio orders on a map. You've got, I mean, it's that classic it, it's like when SAT nav came in.

It was so convenient and gave you so much information. You know, converged technology, David, satellite communications, it's all linked right in there. I got crowbar. Didn't take long. You can imagine with it on ace. [00:16:00] Fantastic. Huge benefit. And suddenly it disappears. You're like, oh, where is everyone? Yeah. And it was, so orders would come through on the radio, but in a warrior you've got your higher command in one ear and your local command in the other.

Mm-hmm. So you could be receiving orders and it was essentially codes you had to write down if it was raining and you have a hatch open. Mm-hmm. You'd be hoping that your pen worked. Um, nice, nice. And that was, that was what you went back to the moment that system went down. And give us a timestamp for this.

Are we talking what year? So this would've been [00:16:30] 2017? 2017, yeah. Okay. And essentially, my, my output, my, the, my capacity to be effective on the battlefield was usually down to whether my lummi color would work. So, see now this, when we talk about experience, this is the empathy, isn't it? Mm-hmm. So you're like, your pen might not be working, your bits of paper, and we are wondering if it should be blue, green, or red on the Yeah.

And it's like, you know, maybe, maybe that's not what they, interesting. Doesn't, my console doesn't work, but also two ears receiving different information. Whilst you're wondering why

you, where your [00:17:00] pen's gone, that's gotta be quite stressful at times, I'd imagine. Exactly. And suddenly people start moving everywhere and it's.

There's vehicles shooting, right. Left, and you just go, okay, where do I need to move to? How am I going to find this information out? Right. Right. Because there's no repository, I can't go back. And also trying to talk on the net, it's very, very busy. Yeah. Right. And you can't just go on and say. I'm really sorry.

Repeat serial three. Mm. It's so difficult to jump on the net and sort of say that, so, [00:17:30] and there's no revisionary, so it's really, really complicated. And I'm also thinking about my, you know, I'm thinking about my company, my platoon, my, the people I have in the back of the vehicle. There's so much going on the entire time.

So Zoom is forward five years from that portrait. And, and, and how was the sort of digitalization of the, of that experience moving forward at that point? So as I was leaving, I think the situational awareness was definitely coming down to the individual. [00:18:00] So, um, I believe it's at tax, the, essentially Android is an open system.

People being able to fold out and start getting that information. However, I would argue, and, you know, I was in a, an HQ role at this point, but that was something that was provisioned sometimes, but not all the time. Right. It was definitely a, a nice to have. It wasn't a, an expectation that you would receive that and to make something like that work effectively.

There's a lot of infrastructure that has to go around it. Yeah. The communication, [00:18:30] satcoms 5G, et cetera. There's a lot that has to be in place for that experience to actually be functional. And let's just be, just be clear on the experience. What, what exactly was that? Are we talking like a, a laptop or are we talking like a phone?

A phone Essentially down It fold out now. You know, I also specialize in jungle warfare. Right. I know right now that no technology, like a phone wouldn't survive that. I think even ruggedized like, because most HF radios Right. Wouldn't survive that. Right, right. And at times I remember being [00:19:00] underwater with my rifle above my head.

No way. Crossing a river. So any technology I carried with me had to survive that. Right, right. So it was like one of those things where it beats your, uh, can I just say it beats your train experience? Uh, this morning, Dave, the Taylor woe you gave us on, on, it was busy. It was busy. This is, this is hardship right here.

This is it. This is where you understand, you know, leveling. It's already continue. Please. It's, uh, no, and I, I suppose also one interesting thing as well is that even though you are sort of getting these additional technologies. One [00:19:30] big thing is how to power it all. Yeah. Because yeah, right. You know, if I'm out and keep it charged.

Exactly. Yeah. Because for instance, if I was on a jungle exercise, you know, in terms of say armored ones, you could be out for weeks, months. Mm-hmm. You know, potentially. And so the redundancy's important, but also, you know, do I carry batteries? How do I dispose of them? 'cause I have to carry everything with me.

You know, Bowman, batteries, I think they were around. I mean, they're probably about 15, 20 centimeters. Uh, they're huge. How many charge you get off something like that? [00:20:00] A couple of maybe 12, 24 hours off a gaming batteries, so. Right, right. It's a lot of, um, a lot of administration and actually the Afghan experience, the idea that we went from being very light scale to people carrying 60, 70 kilos worth of kits.

Right. And then actually it's like. Is technology making that easier? Is it meaning I can leave

some kit behind? Well, I was gonna, I was gonna ask a, a similar question to that, which is did the, does the hassle of having to deal with all of that and I'm sure the stress of having to deal with all of [00:20:30] that, is the experience good enough to justify all of the effort you have to put in to get the thing in the first place?

That's a really great question. 'cause I'm not sure, and I suppose because I was going through. A, a stage of quite fundamental change. Right. I think I was seeing these sort of, the, the alphas of that, and I would, it would be fantastic to go back and sort of chat to people now. Mm. But you know, for instance, thinking about the atac, like, you know, the idea of something for a phoned folding out, how do I, how do I open that and view it at night without somebody seeing [00:21:00] that signature?

Yeah, of course. Can I view it through night vision, right. Or do I need how, and also what's the signature of that? Right. It's all these things that actually as a user, I know I can go under a poncho, pull out a ping prick torch and look at my map and sort of find where I am, find where I need to go, that works.

You know, I can have a recky platoon build a model using cardboard, um, and I can, you know, note that down, write a pencil, sketch of it, something like that, and then go and attack that objective. It's [00:21:30] actually, I think a lot of it, particularly in the infantry, was down to those core skills. Protected me. Made sure that I could be co as covert as possible, and so that.

The impact technology was like, okay, is this gonna make me like more lethal, but also is this going to make me more, uh, it more easily compromised, right? In a type situation? And it's like that, that thinking is ve there says, well load them up with tech and it'll be great 'cause they'll love all the information they ever needed to make the next best decision.

And you go actually. That might not [00:22:00] be very convenient for the situation. And I, it is that, it's that learning I suppose. And I, I'm sure a lot of people who aren't in that world don't really think in that way. Yeah. And yeah, there's that sort of ha So when, when you are talking to people who haven't lived the world you've lived in, is it a, a painful exp sort of process to go through, try and explain the situation?

Or they did LA they latch on and understand quickly? 'cause that's a, that, I mean, what you've got is invaluable experience for those who build tech. I think it's definitely depends on the individual, but in the mainstay [00:22:30] it's that it's getting in early enough to ingrain that experience in the, in the development of whatever we're talking about.

Because sometimes you get right near the end and you sort of say, I. You know, for instance, we looked at augmented reality, like the idea you could wear glasses or something like that. And I was thinking, well, I wear cam cream. Are these, are these easy to wipe? Yeah. Yeah. Do they steam up? Yeah. Yeah. And it just, you know, somebody could get right to the end stage and think this is perfect, and then suddenly they're like.

Oh, wait, no, this doesn't work. [00:23:00] Because that's the, the, the person who's going to use this will use it in a certain way, you know, is it impact proof because I want my eyes protected from blast, you know, or fragmentation. Is it, is it sort of tested to those levels? All these sort of things. It's getting in early.

Building that user experience in, because that's usually one where it's best received, but also most useful. 'cause sometimes you get these fantastic products and they're just not viable for an actual tactical user. Yeah, well the, the, the built for normal kind of just [00:23:30] day-to-day life. Yeah. And not life in the extremes at either end, you know what I mean?

So it's like the, the economies of scale of it are gonna make that difficult, aren't they? So you wouldn't want, like, you know, the, that rare band meta glasses. They're probably not suitable for the sort of environments you are talking about, I suspect. Yeah, but they were never designed for that in the first place.

I wonder what the, I wonder whether experience design around the sort of experiences you are talking about, it has now become a thing. So you've moved from being the thing, you know, the technology that's supporting us may or [00:24:00] may not even work. To a situation where the technology may or may not be helping you, but actually it's, it's almost burdening the situation 'cause you're now having to think about charging and keeping things dry and all of those sorts of things.

Has it now evolved to a point where experience design is, is, is more around what's required and the conditions that it's in? So I think it is improving, but also one thing is that a lot of what's purchased is purchased for say the Army. Mm-hmm. [00:24:30] And so it will be incorporating a number of different personas within that use case.

Right? Right. And actually we saw that in a lot of the, you know, personal, uh, uh, personal load, um, so backpacks and, um, those kind of things, body armor, it was built for a general user. Rather than specific personas within that. So I think in general the, the answer is yes, but actually when we consider, okay, what does the logistician, who's driving the, the eight ton vehicle [00:25:00] need, what does the, um, infantryman, you know, who's deploying from a Warrior armored vehicle need?

I think actually. A lot of, because these programs are quite large, they need to incorporate loads of personas in one, and actually that can mean that the end result is quite divergent for maybe certain groups within that. And do you get where you've tried to design it for so many personas? It actually just.

Make something that's crap for everyone. Yeah. Yeah. So it's universally crap as opposed to let's have three variants of it or try and make [00:25:30] it all in one. And you go, nobody likes it. Robert, Robert spent his career becoming a level four architect. You know a lot about this. Yeah. How do we homogenize this?

So it's crap for everyone. I'm an expert. What I like to think is last common denominator design wins the day, but I think it's the one that gets through all the governance committees. Anyway. Dave, I am an expert at getting things through governance. World class, my friend. But you see it in, in technology now that every different part of the military wants something unique [00:26:00] to them.

Yeah. Right. And actually there's a real, there is a power in that, that we, that each branch of the military will have specific use cases. And, but I think it's the, it's almost a spectrum of, at one end, we want something really specialized. Helps individuals and individual personas. And then on the left hand side, you've got something that is so general, it's pointless.

Yeah, you go. I just, uh, so where, where do you funnel your ideas? Do you actually come from the field or is it, you know, how do you make sure that those ideas in the first place are really coming from a [00:26:30] problem that they would like to be solved? Or how does that work? So I suppose for me, like. I will always try and ingrain.

I, I suppose, because a lot of what I do is quite high level at, at the moment. So some of the principle things have been working with more backend systems. It's really trying to incorporate, like, I'm just trying to do that almost as a mental check as I go through. Um, in the mission space. It's a lot easier to incorporate those things really early and sort of say,

okay, how does [00:27:00] that, you know, I think.

From my experience, I would think this could be better or this could change. And actually what's, what's really good in that process as well is on those sort of mission specific items. You're usually working with a team who's deploying this and, and, and utilizing on the day to day. So you verify in the beginning, right?

I think, yeah. Yeah, definitely. Because also one thing is that my experience is not universal, but also is not, I, I'm sort of out for, I've been out for a couple of years, so I don't want to. Come in and say, oh, I did it like [00:27:30] this. Um, I'm trying to build that in and empathize a lot more, um, with those people who are doing the job now.

And, and I can imagine that they also respond differently to you than if a corporate consultant. Not mentioning any names, no point to me. You just, just for the listeners as pointed straight at me when she said that. Not Dave. Me, I got that. I, I, some of us have, you know, I've, I haven't lived anything like that, but some of us have lived on the consumer side of it.

Robert, you know, moved 25 years, so [00:28:00] Right. I'm just gonna fold me arms and a rump. Now that's it for me. But Rob is better at governance than me. There is no doubt about that. He's excellent at it. Yeah, but I don't think you even wanna, you wanna be better at that. But it's a, it's a very interesting point though, which is the, um, you know, my world Yeah.

Or enough about my world that you'll understand what I'm going through, therefore, I want to talk to you. You speak the same language. Yeah, yeah, exactly. The lexicons the same. Yeah. Empathy's always the important thing I want, I did wanna zoom out from the individual experience that we've talked about, uh, quite a bit [00:28:30] there, um, to the changing nature of conflict itself, especially over the course of say the last.

You, you pick a time period, I'm gonna say 20 years. It might be shorter or longer than that, but how do you characterize that, especially having been having lived through some of it? Yeah, so when I came into the military, we were definitely moving from the Afghan generation, so that was definitely winding down.

The idea of the centrality of counterinsurgency operations into how militaries were spec, [00:29:00] uh, specked, you know, um, the vehicles we were using, the equipment we were carrying, that was definitely ending. And we are moving back towards a more conventional form of form of combat. But actually it was a conventional form of combat that was grounded in a Cold War experience.

The idea of large tracks of armor moving across central Europe, you know, big maneuvers and things like that. I think there was also a recognition from the British perspective that we didn't have the scale to do that anymore. Right, right. We didn't quite have the, [00:29:30] uh, British army, the Brian, the, the, the size and almost, um, almost sort of a extremely sad, but the crane war starting.

And I remember being in camp when that was announced, sort of hearing on b BBC news. And I think what that brought into Stark reality was that some parts of that Cold War experience still maintained. Right. There are large defensive, um, fortifications along the border. There's barbed wire, there's trenches.

It's very grounded, very, very physical. Yeah. [00:30:00] But there's also, you know, drones, I think drones are the standout technology from the Ukraine war, right. Um, the idea that tanks are now developing, you know, there's huge like awnings and different sort of ways of up armoring sort of from, you know, we have reactive armor that was quite traditional, but

now we have.

All sorts of ways of defeating drones and armor's taking it was quite prevalent at the beginning of the war. Mm-hmm. But now it's becoming less prevalent because they're high value assets. Right, right. And I think understanding that [00:30:30] sort of, actually some of this is moving quite quickly. Some of this is very technology dependent.

You know, drone warfare, all those sort of things. But actually a lot of this is still grounded in a very physical, a very difficult. Um, you know, defensive, um, experience. And that's something that I remember being the toughest part of my training. But, you know, and I think it's something that we thought it would be a lot more maneuver based.

Right? Right. But actually entrenched defensive positions supported by technology is something we're seeing more and [00:31:00] more, and actually I think is what Ukraine is showing, um, to be something more like we, what we'd see if we went to war. Now I see, I, I, I mean a very sad and complex situation for sure. How do you think it.

Impacts like the technology enablement around that and education for soldiers being in a tragic situation like that, how, how does that show up today? It sounds like maybe in some of the characterization you were talking about before, but it was a [00:31:30] little bit like you need to be trained for when things are not working.

You gotta sort of assume it's not gonna work. Is that different now on the ground, do you think? Or, or fundamentally, because there's still that element of. Very difficult physicality about it. It, it's, it has actually broadly the same no matter how good your smartphone is.

So I think, I think the, the learning process is speeding up. So I think you're right that the absence of technology is still something [00:32:00] that develops. There's jamming, there's all these sorts of things. Yeah, yeah, yeah. However, if you look at, say, people taking phones in, I think it's more prevalent at the beginning of the war and then being targeted by, you know, sort of, um, opposing force assets.

Mm-hmm. You know. The cycle of change has been, uh, uh, sped up because I think because when we talk about actual conflict, we can write change in, unfortunately, in lives. Mm. And you know, to take, uh, an example from, you know, [00:32:30] Afghanistan, the idea of the development of vehicles V-shaped holes, like I remember going through training for when a vehicle turns over.

And the whole point was that was because when they realized they couldn't blow up vehicles, they started pushing them into ditches and trying to fill the, the, the troop carrying areas with water, right? And so you had, uh, ways to cut out of all these adaptations came at the cost of somebody getting hurt or unfortunately at times killed.

And so Ukraine has sped that up. [00:33:00] And I think that that's the real innovation, you know, and where those, because they're written in, unfortunately in sort of some of the highest costs, you know? Um, in, in some really unfortunate costs. Right. And, and, and if we kind of zoom out then from the, uh, sort of the, the defense industry itself and, and talk about that from a perspective that you hold now, which is that the tech enablement industry back onto it, what do you think the responsibility of the, of the tech industry is on, on helping and making this better as, as much [00:33:30] as is possible?

Yeah. So. If we take Microsoft's actions, you know, in Ukraine, like we managed to move alongside a lot of other technology companies, a lot of assets out of Ukraine, and allow their government to continue functioning, however, that comes with a massive amount of responsibility. Um, you know, us and other technology providers are now trusted by

governments all over the world to, um, uh, to store and, uh, store important data to run important services.

Now that trust needs to be [00:34:00] maintained, and so security must be paramount. You know, it must be the first thing we think about. And the last thing. To make sure that, you know, malign actors aren't sort of accessing that information. We also need to sort of preserve the availability of services because ultimately, you know, for us it's a server may be going down or, you know, someone in the UK it's their, you know, a app.

They would get an NHS appointment or something like that going down. So the, I think the burden on technology companies is to basically fulfill the level of trust that [00:34:30] they're now getting from, uh, from governments, from companies and users.

So Ben, we've been talking about like innovations in the field and user experience. What I think a lot of stories also, especially in the, the last couple of years, are about improvisation, like hacking apps and drones, et cetera, in the field. What do you see in that space? [00:35:00] Well, I think one of the key things I'm seeing in this space is just the fact that so much more technology and education is available so soldiers can go out and do these things and actually use their intuition, um, and some of the incredible technologies available to, to just find what works for them.

And I think, you know, having, I mean, Ukraine, but also, you know, for, for people locally, like there's, there's a lot more understanding of how important this is. I still think it's a little stifled, particularly in the uk I [00:35:30] think, you know, we still have a lot of governance and things, which are important. But actually, you know, I remember getting deployed.

I could, I gave a drone to one of my, one of my team, and by the end I had all these, all these assets. 'cause he'd just gone off, he'd done a little bit of interesting data work in the sidelines and was like, boss, check this out. That's, that's really cool. And it's just giving people space to do that, that's so important.

Right. We talk about that, about being, uh, having freedom, autonomy, use your intuition, go out and do something, and you might [00:36:00] find something improvise. You add value and improvise, I suppose from your, from your world that you talk about. It's almost allowed more because you know you have to do it if you want to get advantage and understand what's going on.

Whereas sometimes when we think about back at base or whatever, it's a bit more stifling and you're not allowed to go and do that. So it's, uh, we need to learn more from this type of, but you don't say that it's actually the system failing or is it the way you really, if you improvise, you really, you know, you, you, you experience it on the spot.

So it's [00:36:30] actually innovation. What would you say? So I wouldn't say the system's failing because I suppose the system is, is actually delivering, you know, we're delivering training, we're delivering people with the right education equipment and things like that, but it, the, the amount of time that takes seems only to grow.

And I suppose it can stifle that, that opportunity. So it's almost that it's in some ways there's, there's too much of the system. Um, and it's not leaving gaps for people to have space to innovate. [00:37:00] Mm-hmm. You know, going on deployment is almost a suspension of that cycle and actually being in an environment where they can play, they can test things out.

And actually, you know, I remember speaking to friends who sort of gone to, um, certain aspects of the military and they, they. Basically allowed them more and more space to, to innovate and to, to experiment with things. And they've loved it and they've been like, I don't

want to go back to, you know, the day to day.

Mm-hmm. Um, but I suppose that system is delivering what we as, as a, as British people need to. Def, uh, defence to [00:37:30] deliver. We need sort of capable soldiers, well-trained, ready to go, and it is delivering that. It's just maybe not, um, allowing space for innovation to, to, to move forward and, and take us into that next stage.

It's, it's that always that power of crowdsourcing. Mm. If you give a problem to a crowd and you just let them go off and try and work out on there, and you come back with some absolutely outstanding answers that you just never thought of, diversity. In that group and just what they're gonna do with it.

Yeah. You find some really cool stuff and it's like, maybe we should do a lot more of that. Well, it sounds like we should anyway. [00:38:00] Oh yeah. But would you say that it's actually changing the system or forcing the system to change to, you know, to keep up with the speed of innovation in the field? Yes. So yes.

I would say that it's because also if we think about, particularly when we come to technology that. We have, you know, soldiers or, um, you sort of, any, sort of, any person in the military can see stuff happening. You know, they can access incredible technology on their mobiles, and then they actually deploy into the field with a weapon.

They're like. I'm suddenly, I've gone from the, [00:38:30] you know, the 21st century back into the 20th. Mm. Like, how does this work? And actually, I'm more vulnerable now. I, I want these technologies, I want to be able to ask an LLM, Hey, what do you think the enemy's gonna be doing now? Hey, like, where is, you know, where is my team to my left?

Like the, you know, where's the, where are the other formation units? And so I suppose that is creating that momentum and also just, I guess, how accessible technology is. Mm-hmm. You know, you can have people, um, excel really quickly through that, and I think that's, the military is encouraging that in a big way.[00:39:00]

We're starting to see the professionalization of a lot more technology skills within the military. So that is helping to build, you know, I guess sort of change the system from the inside as well. And, and do you think there's a generational thing in there as well? 'cause obviously it's one of the fields where the more experienced you have, there's a huge advantage to that.

But also you might not have maybe grown up with technology in the same way. Do you see that as a generational gap of new people coming in with different thinking to maybe people who've been there a long time or are [00:39:30] they adapting faster? I don't, you know, so just a, yeah. I'd say it's difficult to, uh, to pin because I think from, from my perspective, particularly when I came to the operational end, the commanders I was working with were really focused on innovation.

They were really keen for ideas, and I suppose it's that mission focus. When you maybe stepped away, and I suppose we're sort of back in the day to day of things, that's when it can be a bit more stifling. And that's where I think you maybe find that traditional, [00:40:00] no, no, we need to train, we need then need to go to operate.

Where actually, you know, they're sort of part of that older system. Whereas actually a lot of the people I came into contact with who just had a FO had a mission. They were like, Hey, I want your ideas because to me this is really complex. I want you to come in and just. Find something radical to, to give me options.

And, and, but I can imagine that, that all the system is also for the value, like safety and

compliance and trust. Yeah. How do you balance that, you know? Yeah. Safety [00:40:30] is a huge one. And I suppose it's something that has been at the fore of, you know, as we move into a, you know, we haven't been in a sort of act of conflict, um, at least within the Army, um, for a little while.

So. Training and sort of things that can happen during training. We, you know, it's a dangerous, it's, you know, we're working with vehicles with explosives weapons. Um, it, it's a very dangerous space and obviously we don't want anyone to get hurt during that. So there's a very natural focus on safety. Mm-hmm.

But at the same [00:41:00] time, I think particularly when it comes to technology, we can do a lot with that in a very, very safe way. So, um, in my sort of mind that. Like there's some natural sort of, we need to make sure it's safe, we need to make sure it's governed correctly, but actually it's quite easy to innovate and push the boundaries because.

It's just, it's just naturally a bit safer than so ingrained also in your purpose, right? In your reason of existence, there's safety and they're saving lives. I mean, you talk about risk in the corporate environment, then you talk about risk in this environment, they [00:41:30] are very different, uh, viewpoints on it.

Well, talking about corporates, you moved into quite a, a huge corporate company. Is there anything that they can learn from the military? Yeah. So one thing I, and actually it's just an interesting time of year 'cause um, our sort of financial year starts in the summer and actually planning is a huge part of the military.

Yeah. It's there. We have books and books and books on planning. We love it yet. [00:42:00] Planning to me doesn't seem to be a very, very focused activity, and I don't want to call out folks of necessarily, have you been watching Marcel planning this show? Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're talking about planning of this podcast.

It seems we have a whole bring up up now. Brought up. Yeah. I mean, he did look at Marcel, we d when he said about poor planning, I saw his eyes go toing. Collateral damage. Yeah. Yeah. Anyway, but for me. Planning can be, is [00:42:30] very effective when done in the right way. Mm. And I think some orchestration never hurts because I work with some incredibly intelligent people and a lot of people who are quite independent in some ways, but actually sort of working together, building a plan together in a, in a really focused way, I think would make us.

Like, give us so much more. And I think in general, I, I sort of see that for me it was such a big part of being in the military was planning and I don't see it as much in a sort of corporate sense. So I would [00:43:00] definitely encourage more of that and more maybe a few more chief of staff, you know, sort of director, you've got three minutes to do this, you've got two minutes to do that.

I, I think I'd love that a little bit, but. Maybe I'm sort of just a sucker for it. Miss the world you knew. Yeah. Well, look, thank you for joining us today, Ben, and sharing some, I mean, really fascinating insights into a, into a whole of the world, but very similar paradigms in terms of experience design, in terms of how technology is changing, what's possible.

But also [00:43:30] why in your world improvisation also remains a, a real skill in being able to actually still exist without technology supporting the situation. So thank you very much for sharing that, uh, with us today. Thank you. Now we end every episode of this podcast by asking our guest what they're excited about doing next.

And that might be you have a great restaurant booked at the weekend, or it might be

something in your professional life or maybe a little bit of both. So, um, Ben. What are you excited about doing next? Well, I've booked my first a hundred mile bike [00:44:00] race in the peak district on an e-bike. We're assuming it's an e-bike here now.

Unfortunately not an e-bike. Oh, no. You can get e-bikes now. You know that technology exists. Back to, I I also heard just today that there more environmentally friendly than a, than a normal bike. What, what flanker told you that Dave? I don't it, I mean, it's an unlikely statistic. Let's C two. Let's face it.

It's about the when, because you, you, you pedal harder. Ex more breath, used more. CO2 expelled. Are you gonna explain it again to us? No, I mean, I, I dunno [00:44:30] whether you're buying this, are you going with the environmentally friendly way of doing it or are you gonna do it in the old, uh, traditional way of, I think I'm gonna do it in the traditional way You're gonna breathe out.

I think I will be, I think it's 2,600 meters of ascent. So I think by the end I will be begging for an e-bike, but Wow. Quite fun. 2.6 kilometers up. I mean that's that outstanding out, you know, you don't have to do these things. I know. I just think it's part of my brain, unfortunately. And where's that from too?

[00:45:00] What's the So Bake. Well it's a big Loopt bake well, so, ah, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And you're gonna get a tar halfway. So that's exactly what I was about. To I column top the column pie. Bake well pies. I think it's tar. It's something like that. No, I know, I know, I know. Outside of Bakewell, no. Bakewell Pudding.

That's what they call 'em. That's it. Puddings. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Bakewell Pudding. Then you can do some Tai Chi afterwards. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. If I can get me started on Tai Chi, I'm all over that. After cycling 2.6 kilometers upwards, um, I'm not entirely convinced you'd want to do some Tai Chi. [00:45:30] So, yeah, Bakewell pudding.

They, they are pretty good. Yeah. Yeah. I can't wait, but hopefully that'll be at the end when I've, when I've completed it. So, well, look, we, we wish you nothing but the best for that. Good luck with it. Thank you so much. I hope it goes very well.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues of this week's show and how they might impact you and your business, please get in touch with us at Cloudrealities@capgemini.com.

We're all on LinkedIn and on Substack. We'd love to hear from you, so feel free to connect and DM if you have any questions for the show to tackle. And of course, please rate and subscribe to our podcast. [00:46:00] It really helps us improve the show. A huge thanks to our guest, Ben, our sound and editing wizard, Ben and Louis, our producer, Marcel, and of course to all our listeners.

See you in another reality next [00:46:30] week.

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