



Ministry
of Defence

SMA UK MoD Panel Discussion

**From Pain to Possibility: What Can Neuroscience,
Design, and Disruptive Technology Teach Us Today
About Transforming Leaders and Organizations for
Tomorrow's Unknowns?**

Part of the SMA UK MoD Speaker Series, entitled

*COVID-19: Second- and Third-Order Effects—System
Shocks, Disruption, and Emergence*

**Thursday 27 August 2020
1000-1130 EDT/1500-1630 GMT**

[Join the Event](#) via MS Teams

Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff/J-39 DDGO and executed by ASD (EC&P).

Agenda

Panel Description: A neuropsychologist, technologist and a designer walk into a bar..... No, this isn't a stand-up routine; it's a candid exploration of our current crises and the negative consequences sparked by a lack of imagination and a reluctance to listen to the imaginative among us. Fortunately, this interdisciplinary conversation can help us understand our current crises in a more optimistic way. When future low probability, high consequence events strike, how will we prepare, learn and change the consequences to our advantage? Dr. Julia DiGangi, Joanie Myers and Alexa Courtney will explore how we can turn international adversity into opportunities for unparalleled growth. Join us if you are curious about the biological hard wiring of behavior change and the paradoxes our brain presents for action in the current moment. Join us if you've ever tried to pitch a risky, wild idea that was shot down in the moment but in retrospect would have had an essential impact. Join us if your leadership or organizational culture optimizes for the status quo and needs a new playbook for adaptive capacity. This conversation is about embracing the risk to rapidly change and transform – as individuals, small teams and organizations.

Series Description: The US Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) and the UK Defence Science Technology Laboratory (Dstl; part of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence [UK MoD])¹ have partnered to create the “COVID-19: Second- and Third-order Effects—System Shocks, Disruption, and Emergence” speaker series. With all of the focus on the very important tactical aspects of arresting the infectious disease and preserving life in response to the novel coronavirus (first-order effects), the aim of this series is to elevate the conversation to a more strategic level and consider the second- and third-order effects across global systems. In this context, it is perhaps helpful to view COVID-19 as a *Gray Rhino*,² one of many highly probable, high-impact, yet underappreciated threats that could present similar patterns of systemic shocks and disruption in the future.

Our approach in this series is to ask gifted thinkers to apply a combination of foresighting and sensemaking for the SMA and the UK MoD communities. Speakers will explain what they are watching, communicate how they are making sense of these observations and patterns (analytic approaches), and give us a hint of what we should be keeping an eye on (e.g., Are there historical patterns? Should we expect transformative changes to the global order and who might be advantaged by them? Where do the speakers see fragility, anti-fragility, adaption, and even perhaps emergent behaviors that may have consequences?). Our goals are to reach beyond monitoring; to actively understanding the breadth, complexity, and impact on national defense and security with the clear aim of working towards mitigation, resilience, and sustainability; and to turn thought into action.

What do the second- and third-order impacts from the Gray Rhino that is COVID-19 teach us about future Gray Rhinos beyond infectious disease? What does this Gray Rhino reveal about the often underappreciated relationships between national security, economic and financial systems, governance, populations and the social contract, and political stability throughout the globe? How might this understanding shape our decisions going forward? The future global world order, technology and COVID, the health and security nexus, societal resilience, and the utility of the systems thinking, and net assessment are just a few of the issues that we hope to explore in this series.

Speakers: The speakers for this discussion are provided below.

- **Ms. Alexa Courtney** (CEO and Founder, Frontier Design)
- **Dr. Julia DiGangi** (Founder, NeuroHealth Partners)
- **Ms. Joanie Myers** (COO and Co-Founder, Strategic Link Partners)

¹ SMA POC: Nicole Peterson, npeterson@nsiteam.com; UK POC: Ella Fleming, efleming@mail.dstl.gov.uk

² Popularized by Michele Wucker, a *gray rhino* is a highly probable, high impact yet neglected threat: kin to both the elephant in the room and the improbable and unforeseeable black swan. Gray rhinos are not random surprises but occur after a series of warnings and visible evidence.

Speaker Biographies

Ms. Alexa Courtney (Frontier Design)

Alexa Courtney has over 17 years of experience working in the US and globally in South Asia, Africa, and Europe; co-designing strategies with organizations to better adapt and create impact and leading research, assessment, training, and evaluation teams. She pioneered the application of design thinking, innovation, and systems complexity studies to human security challenges. Since founding Frontier, she has worked with executive leaders at large non-profits and commercial firms and with senior leaders across the U.S. Government to apply the tools of design and innovation practices to drive organizational change.

Prior to founding Frontier, Alexa held senior positions in the public and private sectors dedicated to using innovative approaches to tackle complex problems. She led the design, co-creation, and implementation of field research networks in Syria for USAID that allowed Syrians to guide donor assistance toward life-saving needs in near real time. She helped pioneer the design and implementation of USAID's evaluation systems in Afghanistan to determine the impact of donor programs on community stability country-wide. She also facilitated the design of a post-electoral governance strategy for an African political opposition group.

Alexa holds a B.A. in Sociology and International Studies from Yale University and an MSc from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in the Political Economy of Violence, Conflict and Development. She is a former Fulbright Scholar, Aspen Ideas Festival Scholar, and Presidential Management Fellow, and a former Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She was honored by DevEx and Chevron Corporation as one of forty international development leaders under forty in Washington, DC, for acting as a change agent within USAID and driving adoption of innovative approaches to prevent vulnerability and conflict.

Ms. Joanie Myers (Strategic Link Partners)

Joanie Myers is the COO and co-founder of Strategic Link Partners which she created with a partner retired out of the Special Operation Forces community. Former positions include Senior SOF & IC Client Manager for Huntington Ingalls Industries – MDIS and Director of Strategic Relationships & Innovation for Fulcrum a firm acquired by HII, Director, Special Operation Forces (SOF) & Cyber Technologies, ARA, Director, U.S. Policy for SAS, President & CEO of the NC Technology Association and she served as an Assistant Secretary for the NC Department of Transportation.

In 2005 she completed a global Eisenhower Fellowship in Cyber Terrorism and Cyber Security. Joanie Myers has deep expertise in the cyber realm, digital technologies, threat environments, contingency planning, risk management, resiliency, supply chain, global logistics and asset protection. In 2013 Joan was conferred *The Order of the Long Leaf Pine*, the State of North Carolina's highest civilian honor for her work in national security, technology, and innovation. Joanie serves on the Board of Trustees of the National Small Business Association and the Board of the Rick Herrema Foundation. She is also on the Advisory Board of Innovate Educate and Trisector Strategies and has been honored to have been appointed or elected to several other boards throughout her career.

Ms. Myers prowess lies in the intersection of technology, national security and creative problem solving and she is known as a thought leader, collaborator, and force-multiplier in global relationships. A graduate of the University of Michigan, she resides in North Carolina.

Dr. Julia DiGangi (NeuroHealth Partners)

Dr. Julia DiGangi is the founder of NeuroHealth Partners, a neuropsychology-based consultancy, that aids organizations in designing thoughtful interventions related to the neuropsychology of leadership, people management and communications. As a neuropsychologist, Dr. DiGangi brings a brain-based perspective to examining human behavior in organizational contexts.

Dr. DiGangi holds a Ph.D. in psychology and has worked in the field of neuroscience. She has published extensively in the scientific literature as well as in popular outlets such as *Harvard Business Review*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *Psychology Today*. She is known for her engaging, funny and relatable communication style, which allows her to help others think about how the brain's "wiring" affects workplace behaviors such as motivation, change, performance and relationships. She also holds a Masters in Foreign Service from Georgetown University and has worked on various democracy-building initiatives in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. She is known for her engaging and relatable communication style, which allows her to effectively teach leaders how to think about the brain's "wiring" and how these factors affect workplace

behaviors such as motivation, performance and relationships. She worked on multiple U.S. presidential campaigns, at The White House Press Office, and for Axelrod & Associates, so she is accustomed to helping people gracefully navigate fast-paced, high-stakes professional environments. Dr. DiGangi has given a TEDx talk on the relationship between stress and the brain.