[MUSIC PLAYING]

LARRY SUSSKIND:

The idea is to take some hypothetical situations that you've either seen in the movies, read about, or been in, depending on your experience in the public sector. I ask you at tables to think of your best advice to the people in this situation in each hypothetical.

Effective leadership in the public sector, we are asserting, requires different strategies, behaviors, and qualifications than effective leadership in the private sector. The key difference is being able to facilitate consensus-building, decisions made by all, not just by the leader.

They know how to provide direction without taking control, empowering others to make decisions and helping to resolve conflict among stakeholders and interest groups. And we talked about doing those things as a form of service. We alluded to but didn't get into much detail about facilitation responsibilities, both at the table, where you're trying to work with a group, and away from the table on behalf of the group.

Before the group comes together, there are things that the facilitative leader can do, must do, to make the chances of succeeding when they are together at the table increase. At the table and away from the table-- we'll be using that phraseology the next several sessions.

And we talked about facilitative leaders who both encourage advocacy on the part of the people they're working with and inquiry on the part of participants. And that's not easy to do. Some people find that their advocacy impedes their capacity to inquire.

Enabling discussion of undiscussable issues-- you want to provide leadership in the public arena and you're assisting a group, there are things that they really need to talk about if they're going to reach any kind of informed agreement. When a facilitative leader seeks to bring a group into a conversation about things which, for some of the people, very uncomfortable, how do they do it? It's part of the facilitative service that they provide. They have to know how to make the undiscussable discussable.

Any hope of working through and resolving their disagreements hinges on moving all of the participants in a public dialogue, from positions to interests-- not a guarantee that that's going to get you to agreement. But if all people are doing is repeating their demands, you're not going to get anywhere.

A facilitative leader seeks unanimity but settles for overwhelming agreement. You don't vote. You're not interested in what the majority wants. And the reason-- if you say unanimity is the measure of the decision, you invite blackmail. You have some actors in the group whose primary objective is to sabotage the group, and they're happy with that.

In many quarters of the world, people think of this as the UN problem. You're saying, we can't do anything unless everybody agrees. And some people say, oh, good, we're still on that. That's great. That'll mean nothing bad will happen that I don't like.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So here's the first scenario. The mayor has appointed a blue ribbon committee to advise her on a new process of public budgeting, one that will ensure greater public engagement. The mayor named a leading corporate figure in the community, the CEO of the largest employer in the city, to chair or lead this advisory committee.

There's an immediate backlash in the press. The community is convinced there was no way this person should have been named to be the leader of this group. Question to you-- what's your advice to the CEO regarding, A, how to introduce himself to the rest of the committee and the public? Secondly, how do you think the CEO should prepare for the first meeting of this committee? And third, how can the CEO establish credibility with the other members of the committee, let alone the community at large?

So we're looking for your table's best advice to this CEO. How could this person be an effective leader?

- AUDIENCE: Is it inappropriate to suggest that he resign as chair?
- **AUDIENCE:** That's what I was thinking.
- **AUDIENCE:** And not necessarily from the whole committee.
- **AUDIENCE:** Just as chair.
- AUDIENCE: Yeah.
- **AUDIENCE:** But then are they still a leader after that?
- AUDIENCE: I feel like that could be contentious. It feels like a little bit of a slap in the face to the mayor, then.
- **AUDIENCE:** And it is a budgetary committee. I do think there's a lot that the public sector can learn in some ways from the private sector.

What is his commitment to the community? How has his business given back to the community?

AUDIENCE: Maybe taking a back seat on the next couple of meetings, kind of just saying, I'm here, everyone lay your ideas out on the table, maybe not dominating meetings as much as he could, or they could.

AUDIENCE: But eventually he's the chair. I agree. He cannot dominate, but he will be asked to intervene at some point.

AUDIENCE: If his role is a facilitator, at the end of the meeting, giving that unbiased summary of what's happening. It's not skewing anything or only pulling out the opinions he agrees with, but really giving a summary of everything that was covered.

AUDIENCE: At this table, we threw out a couple of different options, mostly centered on the question of how does this person establish credibility right off the bat. In the first meeting, what can be done? And then Will here had a great idea, which was, what if the person sets up meetings beforehand with a representative sample from this committee so that when everyone does show up to this first initial meeting, those people can see that the CEO person has taken their advice on board and has listened to their concerns and their thoughts?

- AUDIENCE: We were discussing, and Bianchi spearheaded the idea of recognizing the backlash that is preceding this CEO, trying to not subvert the backlash, but address it head-on in a one-on-one setting that allows someone, in a structured format, to air their grievances, but also their interests, so that you aren't entering into the first committee meeting in a cacophonous room full of maybe misconceptions, stereotypes-- not only in the sense of establishing credibility, but also from a purely facilitative standpoint, I don't want to say control the narrative, but maybe set the record straight from where they intend to come in.
- AUDIENCE: We were talking along kind of similar lines about this role of transparency, specifically in the first meeting, for the CEO to go in and very clearly delineate what their expertise is within this setting and what their expertise is not, and so, in that sense, opening up space for the other members of the committee to take on leadership roles in sharing their own expertise, and also creates an opportunity as well for the CEO to express his own interest and true desire to learn from the other members of the council and from the community as a whole.
- AUDIENCE: One of the things we were talking about, not necessarily hearing from folks before the first meeting, but really using that first meeting to establish guidelines, checks and balances systems, and the process that's going to come about to really focus around trust-building and coalition-building, during that first meeting or first several meetings, really taking an unbiased view of taking notes and listening to all of the different people who are in that room and then giving a very unbiased feedback or recap of that.

And so then people will begin to understand that they can voice their opinions, voice their thoughts, without anything being overlooked or brushed over because they're not in agreement with this leader-- identifying himself as a human being and not just this kind of powerful figure, and then being really clear about how he will be held accountable and how this process will work.

- AUDIENCE: I'm curious to hear your thoughts on this, whether it would be appropriate, given how poorly the process started for this CEO in the first meeting, to offer voluntarily to resign as chair. I don't know. Say, anyone else in the room, we can come up with a new process for finding a new chair. But then we also talked about maybe that would be insulting to the mayor in this context.
- LARRY Resigning and leaving? That just confirms the fact that this was the wrong person to take on a leadership role in SUSSKIND: the public sector. But possibility is changed if they recognize the danger of proceeding in the way that people are immediately upset about, and they say, not an assistant, a co-chair. And they have to make sure, before they put the mayor in the position of announcing that, that the co-chairs will be able to work together. So then they're delivering to the mayor a proposal that's already been worked out. That's how I would respond to the resigning idea.
- AUDIENCE: It's interesting that it becomes about who the CEO is and why they were appointed rather than who the mayor is and why they appointed that way. And I think it's more reflective of, actually, what the mayor wants and how they wish to lead if they're going to appoint a CEO, theoretically, based on the fact that they think this person can operate the steering committee from a hierarchical point of view.

How is it reflective of the mayor and what they want and how they wish to lead and what sort of leadership stance they prioritize? It actually makes me want to put the attention on that person versus the person who's appointed and how they need to then figure out what to do in order to deal with someone else's decision about them. LARRY SUSSKIND: If you ask, what's it take to be an effective leader in the public sector, I would argue more than whatever the skill is and the experience is that worked for you in the private sector. Some other additional ways of building trust as a way of establishing credibility, and not assuming you can count on your title and your history as a source of credibility.

I had imagined we would be through several scenarios by now, and I don't want to keep you from dinner. While you're having dinner, I will ask you to talk about a second scenario.

So I'm going to switch the context in this scenario. Scenario takes place in a different city, different metropolitan area, in one of the inner suburbs. The school committee-- being attacked from all sides.

The teachers have voted no confidence in the superintendent. The teachers' union is demanding that the superintendent resign. The elected school committee is divided, some backing the superintendent and some supporting the teachers union.

There are a whole raft of policies behind this that are dividing the community-- whether current efforts to ensure student safety in the buildings are adequate; who is to blame for the very low scores on statewide exams in this city as compared to other schools in nearby cities; the need for either more or less parental control over the content of the K-through-six curriculum; whether or not more investments should be made in advanced courses for the most gifted students; the desirability of mainstreaming versus or rather than separating special needs students.

All these issues, this division, sharp division between teachers and the superintendent, between and amongst teachers, amongst family members-- what's your best advice to this superintendent under this circumstance, given all of this, all of this hostility, all of this difficulty? How would you help this person get things back on a useful track as the leader in the schools and education area in this community?

So the idea is you have table discussion, and then we'll see where you come out and see if we get any differences.

- AUDIENCE: In my previous job, we talked a lot about making sure that we come in with a clear goal and what is actionable from this feedback, not just going in generally to get feedback, but coming in with concrete ways that the feedback can actually be used-- setting expectations like, this is what we can change, this is what we can't, here's how the conversation could impact that.
- AUDIENCE:Probably better to just be upfront with what's in our realm of talent right now and even short-term monitoring.What could we change this year? What would we need to work on that will probably take 10 years?
- **AUDIENCE:** You have workers who are not believing in you. Their trust is completely lost in you. It depends on them for whatever plan you have to be successful.
- AUDIENCE: They're not feeling heard or they're not having vested trust in their, quote unquote, "leader" then creating mechanisms for distributing that leadership amongst the teachers.

AUDIENCE: I would first see what the problem [INAUDIBLE]. I would talk to people.

After that, I'm going to be like, OK, now let me get a team of experts on the issues that were highlighted. And I would try to solve the issue [INAUDIBLE].

--and give that confidence to whoever cares about it. I'm going to use, say, the next six months to remedy this, and you will see this kind of change. And make these kind of short-term goals for people to gain confidence in them again.

- **AUDIENCE:** I think the makeup of those boards doesn't have to be like the people who brought it up at the time. It just should be whoever is most qualified to do that.
- AUDIENCE: Yeah, what are the pivotal moments or places where change could be made? Are they the right person to do it? So what does [INAUDIBLE]-- it doesn't even have to necessarily be immediate.

What does a succession plan look like? How can I have gotten someone else to be able to take this on or point out who I think should be able to succeed me if it's clear that, like--

AUDIENCE: I suspect that it might not happen through a presentation or you telling people that, but that you actually need to get people in the room and then start guiding the conversation towards this common realization. We're all here for the same thing, right? We all want the same thing, right?

The one thing you could actually do is to get representatives from this room and from these different subcommittees in one room, and then you start to get them to think together about solutions, like, oh, if we mainstream these kids, what's going to happen with these other resources that are going to come from mainstreaming them? Can we do something with that? Can you start to get them to collaborate with each other?

- AUDIENCE: Interesting idea, maybe having representatives of each interest, part of the committee. It's not siloed by interest, but it's a representative committee of all the interests--
- AUDIENCE: Yeah, that's a good idea.
- AUDIENCE: --so that they're forced to talk with each other and that there isn't this arm wrestling between the silos.
- AUDIENCE: They would probably choose the one who has the largest voice, who's kind of a fighter. But these kind of people may not be good to put in a negotiation process.
- **AUDIENCE:** I think part of being a facilitative leader is also preparing each of these folks to be able to best advocate for themselves. So then you go back to that one-on-one relationship again.

So before you have that meeting where you started to do the collaboration, you need to do preparations with them. But it's also kind of difficult because then, actually, you're not biased towards any specific concern.

So let's say safety of the students in schools, K-to-6 curriculum, the mainstreaming of the special needs students-- you have to show you're not biased towards any single one. That's the hard part.

- AUDIENCE: Yeah.
- AUDIENCE: I think that would also subvert the problem that you're bringing up, that you don't want to just bring the guy with the loudest voice to the table. You want to give others a chance. That's part of facilitating the process because you're helping everyone improve the mindset of being ready to collaborate. Essentially, a decision needs to be made that's in favor of one party instead of the other.

AUDIENCE: I think that the part about preparing them and then letting them do the negotiation amongst themselves at the table kind of builds that trust that you're not biased because people are putting their own skin in the game. You're not advocating--

AUDIENCE: They bring order to the space and enforce rules and bring things to a vote. Yes.

LARRY This hypothetical is what the vast number of people who see themselves as leaders in the public sector areSUSSKIND: dealing with day to day. These are the circumstances that people are being prepared to work in.

And when conflict has overwhelmed whatever forward movement somebody who thinks they're the leader has, they have to have some idea, some strategy. What do you do when all this conflict has wrapped itself around whatever the functional responsibilities are?

Were you trying to think of ways of resolving the conflict, telling the superintendent, you can do this, this, this, and this to resolve the conflict? Were you mostly thinking about talking to the superintendent about how to proceed with the work that needs to be done in spite of the conflict?

Do you think that a leader in this position can do something to wipe the conflict away, to resolve it? If not, what are they supposed to do about the work that's supposed to get done that's completely frozen because everybody's at everybody else's throat?

Are they supposed to mediate this, all these different disputes that they're the focus of? I know they can resign. You don't have to-- I know.

[LAUGHTER]

The number of years people are in positions is getting shorter and shorter in the public sector in the United States and in other countries. Conflict is omnipresent. People either don't know of a way to proceed in a leadership role and trying to resolve the conflict, so they walk away, or they're thrown out because they don't appear to be able to solve the conflict. Whether they leave voluntarily or not, their term is short because the conflict is overwhelming.

AUDIENCE: So our group held that there is accountability to improving the system and accountability by the superintendent to either acknowledge their role in it, also to either facilitate or be adjacent to an ad hoc committee that can facilitate a discovery process or audit of what exactly has been going wrong within the school system, even making considerations for conducting investigations and interviewing with other parts of the school system and key stakeholders to help facilitate a transition process and inheritance of a better system where we understand the challenges that are going on and ways that we can adjust moving forward.

The superintendent still would probably be recommended to leave at that point. However, I do think that their institutional knowledge of the issue is relevant to identifying the key issues of the system.

LARRY Do you believe that if they could just solve one of these conflicts and have it clear that it was their doing thatSUSSKIND: resolved it, and they'd be accepted in that role of trying to resolve them because they're resolved one thing first?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, I mean, I think it seems to be a complex issue where there's pivot points, where there's the most upside if it is resolved. So potentially, solving one and finding out the positive impact from that might give a vote of confidence.

- LARRYSo you would entertain that proposition, that if they can do something and actually take one of these clearSUSSKIND:conflicts in the community and get the people who are primarily the key actors and secret them away somewhere
and help them work that out and then come out together with them and announce, look, we've solved this, and if
we can solve this, we can solve all of our conflicts, trust me--
- **AUDIENCE:** Not exactly. One, I think it requires a more comprehensive strategic approach. But solving a big issue first might be a first pillar of or milestone for that.

LARRY What about setting a lot of different people in motion with responsibility for trying to resolve or mediate different
SUSSKIND: disputes-- in other words, not being the one to resolve these disputes, but saying, I have this person. I don't know if they're loyal to me or not.

But maybe they would accept responsibility over the next six weeks for this particular conflict between this group and this group because they're close to both sides. And I'm asking them to see what progress they can make, and I'm giving them authority to act on that. And then you've set a lot of different people, carefully chosen, on the grounds that there's no chance the superintendent can solve all these problems.

They're the source of most of them, or at least the symbolic source of most of them. What I'm asking is, as you think about your personal theory of practice-- and you have one, whether you confront it regularly and build it or not, you have one-- what do you assume about the management of conflict and the role of leadership? There are sides, the unionists and the people who are managing the union.

I found in real life, as a person assigned as a mediator from outside, they don't even know what they're fighting about. They're really, really angry. They'll tell me a topic. I'll sit with everybody privately, confidentially. I'm just an outsider. I'm just asked to see if there's any way to help.

"There's no way we'll accept the librarians not having the final control of which books go in the library for K through six. That's it, no chance, no way." OK, why?

"What do you mean, why?" Well, couldn't there be an occasion in which the librarians mostly do this, but if somebody has a concern, that the librarians and some other people have a conversation about it, and you can ask for a chance to discuss this without saying the only ones who make the decision are the librarians?

"We never did it that way." I know that, but I'm trying to see whether it's possible to invent a way forward that meets your underlying interests differently from what's been done in the past.

"Well, I don't know if my people will accept it if I were to be in a conversation where that was being discussed." Could we try it and see? Getting people to discuss what they think is undiscussable-- how can you facilitate that?

AUDIENCE: We shifted to a different direction and thought about hiring experts or a technical advisory group of sorts to work alongside the superintendent on the issues that were identified because it's not that the superintendent can solve it all. I don't think the advisory group or the experts can solve it all as well.

What we discussed was to have people who are more knowledgeable of those particular issues and could have a better understanding of how to solve them. And then we also talked about releasing a memo of sorts, which outlines the plan of how the superintendent and his team can tackle these issues because what you were saying about, oh, if the superintendent solves one issue, will that be enough for him to start working on others?

And I think, in a lot of cases, that is true because to gain the trust back of these different stakeholders, even saying that, OK, I'm starting to solve this one issue-- I mean, not one in one issue, but starting small, I think, it's important to gain the trust back of these stakeholders. So I think even starting small definitely helps gain trust of communities and other union leaders and people.

LARRY It's a high-risk strategy to assume that if I could just find the linchpin, solve this one quickly, then everything'sSUSSKIND: going to fit together.

My hunch is, in this particular kind of story, where the superintendent is supposedly the administrative leader, but also is the object of the conflict for many of the parties, that waiting for them to pick one of these disputes and resolve it through their interventions so they can wave a flag and say, you can all have confidence in me, look, I solved this-- probably a losing strategy, whereas, if the superintendent could have private conversations with a lot of the folks who are complaining about something that the superintendent is doing and say, well, would you be willing to take responsibility for the next period of time of getting this, this, this, and this together and coming up with your suggestion of what should be done together?

I don't want to hear a summary of what you disagree about. I'm looking for you to produce positive proposals. And nobody's tried to convene these folks, and I think they would trust you to do that. They're not making final decisions. They're making suggestions together for ways of resolving issues.

And if we could get a half-dozen different people, if the leader can facilitate the engagement of other participants and help build their role in leadership, I'm arguing that the leader's role is enhanced.

AUDIENCE: I think, a lot of times, this strategy is used, the one you're describing. But my problem with this is that you're asking those people to do more labor who are already experiencing these problems. And in a lot of cases, when I worked with a community, especially, it's that they do not want to take responsibility, because they're already frustrated, all these stakeholders.

And then me going in as a superintendent, for example, and saying, oh, maybe you can help me solve this-- and it's like, but that's your job. Do you understand? So I feel like it sometimes puts a lot of blame and a lot of work and a lot of labor on these different stakeholders.

And my question is, how to address that, how to approach this in a way that it doesn't look like that. Instead, it looks like we are trying to co-create solutions. So how do you approach that?

LARRY Next time, I'm going to give you a list of a dozen what I call microskills of facilitative leadership. One is, how doSUSSKIND: you convince someone to take responsibility for helping to solve the problem that they think you're the part of?

You can either do that or you can't. It's not about how sweetly you talk. It's not about being smarter than the other. There's a set of principles for how you get someone who's opposed to you to agree, to help solve the problem with you.

What does it take to develop your capacity to facilitate, to turn around a conflict situation, to set an agenda for a group that has no agenda, to set ground rules for how people in a raucous meeting are dealing with each other.

The final session, I really want to ask you to assess your sense of yourself, your capacity, to become or to be a facilitative leader, or to say, I don't see it. That's not my role. I don't see myself in that capacity.

I really want to get you to take the microskills, to take the things that we talked about last time and this time, and say, do I see myself functioning in this kind of situation?

If you were in the role like the superintendent with lots of people mad at you, partly because of the symbolic positions you have, probably because of the things you've said and done, partly because they just believe different things from you, can you see yourself going to work or not? Can you deal with conflict?

My sense is if you don't have a pathway in your mind for transforming those conflict situations into more workable forms of collaboration, then you're not going to be able to keep it up. It's too hard. You need to envision some path. You need to imagine that you have a half a dozen microskills that it takes to work effectively in that situation. So we will come to that.

Before we stop, I want to come to the gender and race questions that people raised last time. In the case you were just looking at, were you imagining this superintendent male, female, one race, another race? Does it matter to your analysis of the situation?

How should we see, how do we see gender and race intersecting with questions of leadership now that we're talking about facilitative leadership in the public arena? I mean, if you question yourself, do you imagine you were seeing things in a certain way because you were presuming the superintendent was male or female, and because it was female, you imagined there were certain options open to her? Male, no?

We constantly say we should consider gender and race and a variety of other attributes as independent variables. Are they, in fact, relevant variables in any of the conversations that we've had?

AUDIENCE: I have personally witnessed women of color in positions of power. And I think if they were in this hypothetical situation, they would be forced to resign or there would be this almost witch hunt happening. And, I mean, I'm coming from a field of architecture. But I've seen it happen with leadership within that realm, faculty or deans of colleges in that same realm, and it happens very often.

So, I mean, in my mind, I was just imagining a male in this situation. I didn't imagine a race. But I think that when it's-- specifically, I'll only speak to a person of color. I think the repercussions and the processes there are a lot different, oftentimes.

LARRY Because of the expectations of the community around them or because of their own sense of themselves?SUSSKIND:

AUDIENCE: I think it's because the expectations are higher from the community around them. And then, even if they're meeting the same kind of threshold as, potentially, a white male, the expectations are so much higher of them that it's almost impossible for them to succeed in that capacity because someone's only human.

LARRY So can you think of a pathway or a set of steps that would make that diagnosis less likely to be the case? SUSSKIND:

AUDIENCE: I have a question. Where is these scenarios located? In the US? And where exactly? Because, I mean, we keep referring about those cases in the previous session and in this session. Are they global? Because the mores, the values are completely different from country to country and, within a country, are completely different from region to region or from urban to rural.

You mentioned in your case before in the first scenario, why you asked that question, why you choose a CEO of a company-- that, perhaps, here in the US, with the values in certain parts of this country, the values of competition or the value of trades from a meritocratic system or capitalist system, makes that that person is a person that eventually could be admired by the society and perhaps the mayor-- we don't know the hidden agenda of the mayor-- to the person to represent that committee.

But in other parts of the world, people do not have that values of, whether it is a razor company or computer company or hiring people or lead people, because leadership is about completely different values than making money or having a big corporation. I'm not saying that those are the values here in the US. Please don't take me wrong.

But I-- or take me wrong.

[LAUGHTER]

But the question-- I'm saying it's very important that we have a very specific context where this scenario happen in order to respond to those questions. And be aware as well that we have to understand the scenario before we take a decision because one decision in one country could be completely the opposite in another one.

LARRY If you understand the scenario perfectly, are you empowered differently?

SUSSKIND:

I'm accepting the premise you would be more informed. In what ways are you empowered by being more informed? Does it make you more optimistic about the moves you're making and that likely increase your effectiveness?

AUDIENCE: From a deontological perspective, I think that I will be more legitimate to provide advice.

LARRY Your legitimacy because of the moves you make?

SUSSKIND:

AUDIENCE: [Inaudible] what I'm talking about.

LARRY Yeah. I'm trying to convince myself that there's a way to talk about race and gender in the context of leadership
SUSSKIND: that has nothing to do with personality and that has something to do with being able to use the same skills of facilitative leadership that another facilitative leader has in a situation because there's either a match or a mismatch-- I don't know which-- between the race and gender of the person who wants to act as a leader and the constituency or the context in which they're working.

Either that or it doesn't matter. I'm too old to believe it doesn't matter. I've lived through too many things where race and gender have mattered to think that there could be a way that they don't matter.

So now I'm trying to figure out, well, how do they matter? And how can instruction build on what it takes, given that they matter? But I don't see it yet clearly.

What instruction, differently not differently, to females that want to take on a facilitative leadership role? Do they have to learn different things? Do they have to learn it with more confidence? Do they have to learn how they're seen? They learn the same thing, but what they've learned is seen by others, and so they can make adjustments before it's even necessary because of how others are viewing them.

I'm not teaching anything different. I'm not assuming that anything different will play out in terms of the logic of leadership. But I believe that it makes a difference in terms of the perceptions you talked about, women of color in positions of responsibility who expect they're going to be judged more harshly than a white male counterpart would be in the exact same situation.

And if I assume that's true, therefore, what can we do to help bolster the person? Maybe I can't do anything about bolstering the person. Maybe it's the context. And if I have no power to change the context, doing something different for, with, the person won't add up to a different outcome. I don't know which I believe it is.

Think about the questions that came up about the scenarios. I will focus on microskills that I think an effective facilitative leader has to have. I will enumerate them. I will probably use a screen and talk about what those skills are and when I think they come into play and how you can learn them, perfect them, develop them.

That's going to be the focus next time. I want to talk about those microskills of facilitating and empowering and turning a conflict situation into a joint problem-solving situation and shifting people from positions to interests, which I think is, as I said, essential as a step in the process of trying to be effective as a leader. I'll see you again next week.

[MUSIC PLAYING]