[MUSIC PLAYING]

LARRY SUSSKIND: The fourth session is to talk about you in a facilitative leader's role. Do you imagine yourself stepping into a leader role in a public sector? Do you think you need to develop additional skills or capabilities before you would do that? Do you know for sure you will never do that? I want the discussion to be about each person imagining themselves. Yes or no, maybe, but only if in a leadership role in the public arena.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

In the negotiation field, we often teach about the need to be able to self-regulate between empathy and assertiveness. We make that distinction and we make that connection because in most negotiations, we think it's important to hear what the other side's concerns and interests are so that you can find a way of responding to them in exchange for reciprocity.

But if you can't listen, can't hear, can't empathize with their concerns, it's unlikely you'll suggest something that meets their interests, meets their needs and yours. We tend to think of empathy as something we pour out with people we care about. But in this leadership / negotiation / consensus building context, we argue that you need to be able to up the empathy quotient in order to be able to create enough of a relationship with the others to hear their concerns, so that you can construct some proposal that's good for them and great for you.

And if you can't listen and present yourself in an empathetic way, you're not likely to find out from them what's really on their mind and what their most important concerns are. So there's a constant need to adjust, in the context of the kinds of hypotheticals we've been talking about, how much empathy you're exhibiting, how much empathy you're trying to gin up.

I'm not talking about play acting. I'm talking about serious effort to empathize with the concerns of the other. They'll know if it's not serious, and if it's not serious, it won't have the effect you need it to have. So how can you gin up empathy for someone that you disagree with, you don't like, who you think is evil, who stands for bad things.

But I'm saying you have got to find out what's important to them, and you've got to get them to trust you enough to tell you what's important to them so that you can construct proposals for the other, which could be a group and not just a person, and be assertive about that at the same time, in the same setting, in the same interactions in which you have also been empathetic.

There's a tension between them, but both need to be present. There's a really important distinction between facilitation and mediation. I did not call this mediating leadership. I call this facilitating leadership. That's because facilitation means something different from mediation. You can't mediate unless you can claim and perform in a neutral way. The definition of mediation is neutral, non-partisan. Now, no human really is neutral ever.

But in this professional role of mediation, you have to be accepted as non-partisan by the parties. So the measure of your neutrality is their perception of you and their willingness to accept the fact you are not there to advance one side or the other side, or your own interests. Because if someone thinks I've done something that's partisan, they will tell me to leave.

So neutrality goes with mediation. Facilitation is a skill more than it is a role. You have your own interests. You haven't promised neutrality to the group, but you've promised or you're offering to facilitate a collective effort to deal with whatever the conflict or the problem is. Sometimes a spoiler will show themselves and they'll say, I don't care what this process is going to do.

I can't accept anything less than x. And you're trying to have the parties be creative and generate new options that will meet everybody's interests, and this person's proposal clearly will make it impossible if they won't move off that position. We're not going to be part of any agreement, and there's nothing you can say. There's no song you can sing that's going to get me to agree to something where we don't get this, or at least this.

And there's a really very specific maneuver at that moment that facilitators and mediators use. And I can only tell you, from my own experience, it stops the flow of the spoiler's bad vibrations. So when someone says, if I don't get at least this, we're out. And the facilitator says, well, before anybody responds, you wouldn't want any more than that? If I can get the rest of this group to do better than that for you, you wouldn't want to be part of that conversation?

You would be amazed at the way the facial expressions of people who've built up for a week, they're coming to this meeting and they were going to unload, and they know everybody's going to be angry at them or hate them, but they've worked themselves up, and we have to have this. Because the moment they say, well, no, I wouldn't be averse to more, you say, OK, good. So you need to join the conversation. You need to listen to other people's interests.

We need to see how much more value we can create. And then you can make a case for what you need and let's see if we can't reframe. All of it is around moving them off that position. And I'm not suggesting compromise. So they got to take a minute to process it. And then they'll say something like, usually, can you guarantee that they'll get me something better than that?

I said, we can try. I can't guarantee anybody will get anything right now, but there's a really good chance, if everybody is negotiating to try to meet their own interests and others, that we can do that. And they get up and leave because they don't know what else to do. They can't admit that it might be in their interest to stay because they've told their people they were going to come tonight and blast this thing and make their position clear, and too bad for everybody else.

And I don't know what they're going to say to their people when they go back. They'll have some rationalization. But they were so put off by the facilitation response that they just walked away. It's not clear they would never come back. If this process is going to go on a while, as a facilitator, I would certainly call them after the meeting and say, anything that you can say about whether you might rejoin the group? You're cordially invited to come back to the next meeting. No discussion of what happened necessary.

They sometimes will leave, and in some instances, it's possible to bring them back if you can make it not an embarrassing or humiliating process. That's the facilitator's job. You're right to be concerned that there might be spoilers. You're right to be concerned that you're not interested in helping to find some lowest common denominator or compromise that starts with the spoiler dictating the outer limits of what can be produced. You don't want to be part of that, and I wouldn't either. I don't blame you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

A number of people said, maybe someday I might want to be in a facilitative leadership position, but I don't feel like I have the level of self-control or self-confidence to take that role right now. Maybe there's more things I can learn. Maybe there's more things I can observe, but I don't see myself now being able to do that. My response is, well, that's great that you have that perspective on yourself.

Doesn't mean you can't add what skills and competencies need to be added. It doesn't mean you have to sign off forever on the prospect of being in a facilitative leadership role. There are times in people's work life where they're tapped to play a leadership role, and they may not think they're ready, and they say, no. I don't see myself doing that. That's fine. If that's not you, then that's not you. I don't see that as a terrible problem.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

One person described all of the micro skills that I listed for you last time as values rather than skills, as if somehow they're about what you believe as opposed to what you can do. And these are skills. They're learned. You're not necessarily born with them, and they don't come just because you've decided you want them. You have to work to build these micro skills.

And the micro skills give you a repertoire. I think it's a mistake to think of them in the category of values. If you want to use facilitation and consensus building, that's a set of skills, and you can't just wish it. You have to learn it, or you have to work with someone for a while who is already more accomplished at it and indirectly apprentice so that you can try it out and then begin to build your self-confidence about being able to do this.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Several people said, while they could see themselves becoming facilitative leaders, they had no clear idea right now of how you turn a confrontation into a collaborative problem solving circumstance. They don't see how you could make it happen. And so they're happy to see themselves as facilitative leaders, but if that includes transforming a conflict into a collaborative problem solving situation, they just didn't think that was possible.

What I'm going to say is true regardless of whether we're in a leadership context or not. I want to take you to the kind of moment that happens when everybody shows up with their own ideas about what the right design to solve a problem would be, and you decide, well, let's use the next half hour to brainstorm. Everybody still came with their own idea. Somebody says, let's just take the next half hour and engage in brainstorming.

Now, anybody who's done that knows it's just a couple of preconditions for effective brainstorming. Everybody has to agree that everything that's said is an idea, is a suggestion. For this half hour, we're going to brainstorm. In my practice as mediator, my way of embodying the need to move that confrontation into problem solving is often, if I'm sitting across from someone, I stand up and I take my chair and I put it next to them, say, let's see how many things we can think of that we agree on that would be a good idea in handling this.

I'm on your side is what I'm showing and saying. I'm trying to convert the confrontation into a collaborative moment. The idea of talking about how you're going to talk is crucial to transforming a conflict into a collaborative moment. I have to build a different context right in front of us while we're sitting there.

How can we work together? I know everybody's got their own ideas here, and we'll hear about those. But before we do that, let's just see what we agree on are good ideas relative to solving this problem. Let's brainstorm. To brainstorm effectively, we need to hold off on negative or evaluative comments. We need to just put as many things up there as we can. There's a time limit for how long we're going to do it.

Nobody's committed to anything just because they contributed an idea. So don't worry that you're somehow implicitly committing to something that you'll want to move away from. That's about transforming a built-in conflict to a collaborative problem solving circumstance. Doesn't guarantee agreement, but the comments I was seeing from people is, I just don't see how I can be in the middle of a conflict and be a useful facilitator. You've got to discuss the desire to do that.

You've got to set some ground rules. Some people may stay quiet the whole brainstorming session because they can't adjust to that. They're not flexible enough. You can facilitate the transformation of a conflict situation to a joint problem solving situation by naming it as the thing you think the group should try for a short time. That's one way of thinking about the transformation from a conflict situation.

Another is to break up a fairly large group into smaller groups. We work in four groups of three and come up with a criteria for choosing a good design to solve this problem. 10 minutes. Time's up. What did you guys? What did you? What did you? What did you? It's easier to just have to work with three people than 11 others, so we use that as a way of buffering the pressures of the conflict to try to move to transformation.

You're thinking of a move and you're doing it, and you're not worrying about whether people are going to disagree with what you're proposing, and you're not worrying about whether they're not going to like you. You're just ready to try some things that will transform the context.

If you don't know how you could right now be a facilitative leader, because you don't know that you could be comfortable enough in a conflict to help the group transform it, you can learn how to do that. But you need some ideas to begin to work with.

Last point that came from two people separately. I think this whole facilitation thing makes me look soft. I see myself as a principled person who doesn't get pushed around relative to what I believe is right. I believe what I believe. I represent the people I work with.

All I can suggest to you is there are other ways of accomplishing the goal of getting people to support what you believe, but at their own volition, not because you tell them they have to. And I would argue effective is in the middle between soft and hard. Effective is, none of that matters. I only care if you perceive me effective in my role as helping to get a good outcome for the group in which everyone's interests are met.

When someone says, I don't see being in this kind of leadership role, I guess they see themselves more as some of our new national leaders, where they assume they will tell everybody what to do, and everyone should listen because they are the leader. That's not the model I'm talking about. I don't think the people in that role are going to get very far, but we'll see in the United States over the next couple of years whether that approach gets anyone where they want to go.

Someone said, it seems like there's lots of pre-work needed to be a facilitative leader before the gathering of all the parties. And the answer to that is absolutely yes. And that's why you work as a team, and that's why you have other people. It's not just what you do at the table. It's what you do to create the table.

AUDIENCE: I think one of the challenges that I can see myself facing as a facilitative leader is ensuring that all voices in the room are heard equally, while not making it a contrived process. I still want to maintain this, like, spirit of collaboration and people just like openly exchanging ideas.

LARRY SUSSKIND: So do you have some preliminary ideas of how to try that that's not the clunky way?

AUDIENCE: Proposing different questions, maybe. Other questions that might involve folks who haven't been speaking as much. But yeah, I don't know. Open to any other ideas too.

LARRY SUSSKIND: So we're in this context and there's several people speaking a lot, and there's several people hardly speaking. And I feel it's my job for everyone to be heard. I'm just repeating your premise. And I say, wait a minute, wait a minute. We've only heard from a few people. Really, let's let people who haven't spoken yet have the floor. So I have now empowered those folks, and I am going to stop anyone who has spoken before from talking, literally.

That's what my facilitative job is. And sometimes that will make it more comfortable for someone who's been quiet because they don't feel comfortable jumping in when they want to. That's one idea. Another idea is to say, everyone be quiet for a few minutes. Everybody write down two or three answers to the question that we've been talking about.

Short. Just short things. I put a lot of people in that situation. I haven't singled one person out. If I'm not singling someone out who's been quiet, there's a better chance of engaging them. A third thing is to say, we've been talking about this for 45 minutes. I want to get a sense of where the group stands. Let's just go around. Everybody, just 30 seconds. Where do you stand on this?

So I am doing things to encourage the ones who haven't spoken. I can't make them speak and I do not want to call them, say, you haven't said anything yet. Say something. There are a whole series of ways you can try to do that that I think are better than either saying, well, they didn't want to speak. They didn't have to speak.

AUDIENCE: I would say that for me the biggest challenge would be patience and the management of time. I think that sometimes these kind of discussions, when they don't have an end time, it's really difficult to get people to agree because the discussion can keep going. That's something that I would struggle with how to manage.

LARRY SUSSKIND: I think you're right to worry about it. I think every facilitator has to worry about managing time, their time and the group's time. If I'm entering into that kind of situation, I need another person in the group to be time keeper. We could also have a ground rule. We could say, look, we give everybody three minutes for a first statement on anything where you're recognized from the queue to speak next.

I can use that as a device for dealing with one time problem, which is people who talk too long. I would not start a meeting without an agenda, which I sent out ahead. If you have an agenda for any kind of a group, you should have time next to each item, including what is the ending time. But this is about using agendas, and that's the leader's responsibility.

Tools for time management for the group, not just for yourself. You're not making evaluations about what were the good suggestions and the bad suggestions, and you're not editorializing and leaving something out because you don't agree with it. Those are some simple, often used tools by facilitators to deal with the time management problem.

AUDIENCE: Main challenge for me personally is how to deal with people that want to spoil the process. It takes sometimes a lot of emotional resilience to keep myself in a state of mind that could facilitate the processes.

LARRY SUSSKIND: I think it's a challenge for anyone when we are in a process that goes on for a long time, which is why most professional facilitators work in pairs. It has to be someone that you trust to be your alter ego. I'm talking about someone who can do everything you can do as well as you can do it, but you're switching roles in order to let one person rest and recharge.

And if people are going to be spoilers, and they're very good at it, I don't have a magic solution. If I put people on the record of having to give the reasons for why they're doing something, they have to either lie. But many people won't take their spoiler's role to the point of lying because they know it will ruin their reputation in that context for the future. Nobody forgets that that person lied, and suddenly, the spoiler strategy falls away and they become part of the negotiation group.

AUDIENCE: A question that I have is like, not in the moment of being a facilitator, but communicating that out once the decision has been reached, maintaining the vigor of that decision and seeing it through. How do you maintain trust in the process, knowing that, ultimately, you don't have the final say?

LARRY SUSSKIND: You want to be in charge of a written summary of whatever the key outcome findings agreement is, and you want to draft it, and you want everybody in the group to have a chance to comment on it. And if there are disagreements, you may need to reconvene the parties. You can put your name as the point of contact, not the author, as the point of contact at the bottom. And you want to give that to the mayor.

And you want to say, anything not clear in this written statement? This is the group's statement. And then the mayor is going to go say whatever the mayor wants. But the existence of a statement that the whole group had a hand in saying OK to is the best way of ensuring that what came out of the group doesn't go through the political meat grinder and come out in unrelated ways.

AUDIENCE: The problem is that when some of the parties become very rigid and will not move from their stance, what can I do as a facilitative leader? My experiences are all based on my government position. If I am a facilitative leader, without that authority, what will be my role?

LARRY SUSSKIND: Some people in some countries would not be able to accept this informal leadership role while they still held their government appointment. Not true in the United States. Not true in some countries, but is true in some countries. But if that's not the problem, if you can do both, you have to be really clear with the participants. I have this responsibility and this obligation in the world. If there's a point of conflict, I would have to opt out.

And you have to tell that in one way to the agency you work for, and you have to say to the people who still want you to be in this facilitative leadership role, if there comes a conflict, I will tell all of you that and I will bow out. Thank you for participating in the four dinner discussions. We will make this available. Hopefully it will be sitting on the department's website.

I also hope that it does lead to the creation of additional courses dealing with leadership within the public sector that DUSP takes responsibility for. Maybe you can become a constituency to ask for something more on that score. And I'm obviously always available to talk with anybody who wants to pick up on these issues one on one. Thanks. Good night.

[MUSIC PLAYING]