

**BLOOMBERG
HARVARD**

City
Leadership
Initiative

COVID-19 Local Response Initiative

**Insights and Guidance
from 11 Sessions on Crisis Leadership**

Gaylen Moore and Jorrit de Jong, Editors

Sessions 1-11

INTRODUCTION

The Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative aims to help city leaders build the leadership and organizational capabilities needed to make city government as effective, efficient, equitable, responsive, and resilient as possible. This is hard work under normal circumstances.

The COVID-19 crisis presented city leaders with the challenge to act under conditions of high uncertainty and high pressure. The lives and livelihoods of residents were at stake, and there was no complete, accurate information available, no playbook with the right answers, and no guidance on how to navigate the situation in the context of each particular city.

City leaders had to learn in real time how to respond to the crisis. The Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative facilitated this process of fast learning by offering 11 weekly sessions and information services tailored to their needs. Over 288 mayors and 641 senior officials from 370 cities across the United States and around the world participated in the COVID-19 Local Response Initiative, a rapid-response collaboration between the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

They heard from experts in public health and crisis leadership, and learned from each other what worked and what did not in responding to an unfolding and unprecedented crisis. Over 11 weeks, as they scrambled to protect their community members from the disease and provide services to the ill, the bereaved, and the vulnerable, these city leaders shared their stories, concerns, hopes, and plans and got answers to their most pressing questions about the pandemic and how to mitigate not just the spread of the virus but also the economic and social fallout of measures taken to contain it.

Each week, faculty and staff at the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative worked with professors from the Harvard Kennedy School and the Harvard Business School to plan a lesson focusing on a particular aspect of crisis leadership: from problem-solving processes and communications to collaboration, fiscal management, and supporting mental health. After each session, a summary of key takeaways went out via email to participants. These documents are compiled here for easy reference.

For city leaders who missed the first round of sessions, we hope that this compendium of tips, insights, and considerations offers helpful guidance. The public is relying on local leaders to navigate this crisis—to respond wisely, lead a safe and strong recovery, and rebuild communities in ways that make cities stronger, more sustainable, more resilient, and safe for all.

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Session One

March 19, 2020

Real-Time Problem-Solving Under Uncertain Conditions

with Juliette Kayyem and Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard

“In a crisis situation, you must make decisions with 10 percent of the information you want, and you must accept 100 percent of the consequences.” —Executive program participant, HKS Crisis Management

There are **three important leadership tasks** that underlie all other aspects of the work of responding to a crisis.

The first is to **assess where you are in the life cycle of the crisis** with as much accuracy as possible. This will inform the ways in which you allocate your attention and activities and organize the work.

The second is to **establish a problem-solving process for a novel threat**. Routine emergency management processes will not be sufficient for responding to this crisis, which will require rapid integration of new (and incomplete) information, learning on the fly, and nimble reactions to emergent issues.

The third is to **understand the political aspects and identify risks** to be managed in order to keep order, secure and retain support, and create the conditions for effective collaboration under extreme circumstances.

TASK 1: Assess where your city is in the life cycle of the crisis.

The goal is to establish **situational awareness** for yourselves, your team, your organization(s), and the public. All of you are already responding to the crisis, even as the event continues to unfold. As Mayor Durkan of Seattle noted in the *Washington Post*, “Initially, the number of cases remained small and concentrated in one location. But the threat was already growing.” In such a dynamic situation, getting the 360-degree view is not easy, but the effort to do so is vital.

- Understand what has happened to date in your city, where it is today, and where it is headed.
- Marshall the data that you have available to help determine where you are. Identify the gaps: What data do you need?
- Name the specific tasks and responsibilities associated with the phase you are in and clarify who is working on which tasks for the current phase.
- Look ahead to what’s coming and determine who will work on which tasks for the next phase.
- Ensure that your team understands the fundamental needs for the current moment and what to focus on.
- Communicate priorities, needs, and responsibilities to the broader organization.

TASK 2: Put in place a problem-solving process to navigate an unprecedented crisis.

In common or routine emergencies, the issues are familiar and easy to identify; there is clarity and consensus on priorities; the questions are apparent and readily framed for decision-making; prior experience informs decisions; tasks are precisely specified; the orders that need to be issued are clear; and the means to execute them are at hand.

None of those conditions are present in the COVID-19 crisis. We don't have sufficient knowledge about the virus and its consequences, the situation keeps evolving, and the secondary and tertiary effects are hard to predict or even imagine. There is no known "playbook" for how to proceed. Instead, you need an **integrated, comprehensive process for engaging in real-time problem-solving.**

There are six basic principles for creating the conditions for effective leadership of that process:

I. Establish a critical incident management team and process

Form a team to oversee all aspects of the event and response. This team will work together to:

- Identify and understand emerging issues and competing priorities.
- Reframe issues as questions for decision-making.
- Deliberate about key questions and decisions.
- Delegate problem-solving for specific issues to other groups.

II. Assemble the right people (from three categories)

There are three (possibly overlapping) groups of people you need engaged in the process of understanding the crisis and deliberating on responses:

- (1) People who understand and can represent the city's key priorities, values, and goals. (This does not mean people with identical interests! These people should represent multiple interests and points of view.)
- (2) People who have expert knowledge in areas relevant to the virus and its consequences (medicine, public health, logistics, interdepartmental and cross-sector coordination, etc.).
- (3) People who have intimate knowledge of the city, the community, and the workings of city hall.

Diversity is key: People with different backgrounds, perspectives, skills, expertise, experiences, and knowledge will enable you to consider a broad range of options and develop a better and more creative approach. You will likely need to reorganize and reconfigure the team as the event continues to unfold.

III. Engage in iterative, agile, creative problem-solving with continuous updating

The basic steps of the process are:

	Problem-solving step	Leading the intellectual action
0	Establish goals, priorities, and values	Moral reasoning
1	Understand the key issues of the situation	Description
2	Develop options	Creative thinking
3	Predict outcomes from each option	Analytical reasoning
4	Choose the best option	Executive decision-making
5	Execute	Administrative tasking
6	REPEAT!	Reflection and group learning

Note that the process begins with step (0), in which you discern the key values at stake in the situation and set priorities. This process is logically prior to all other decisions because it shapes all of the others. For example, different options are relevant depending on which priorities are chosen. This step may have to be revisited as the process unfolds, since not all values at stake will be evident at the outset.

IV. Create conditions for an effective and agile problem-solving process in a diverse team

Skilled facilitation of the problem-solving process is crucial. To create the conditions necessary for problem-solving:

- Appoint a **facilitator who is not the decision-maker** to operate the process to avoid deliberations converging prematurely to what the “boss” seems to want.
- Keep the design of the decision-making process relatively flat. You need everyone to speak up and share their information and views. In a setting where we don’t yet know the best answer, we also don’t know where the best answer will come from.
- Work hard on developing the “**psychological safety**” of people in the group so that all participants can contribute effectively.
- Make sure the group maintains a spirit of joint inquiry (revealing weaknesses of the current thinking in the hope that others might see a way to ameliorate them) rather than individual advocacy (arguing for your point of view and against the views of others).

V. Execute in a spirit of experimentation and learn your way forward

Remind everyone (your team, your organization, your outside stakeholders) continually that you are in unprecedented circumstances, so your current best answer may need to be revised based on what happens next.

VI. Set and maintain reasonable expectations

In these circumstances, making your best effort, maintaining focus on the things you care about most, and learning as quickly as possible is the best you can do as a team. When dealing with an unprecedented situation with deep uncertainty and very high stakes, the best way to meet that expectation is to build and operate, again and again and again, the best available process for learning your way forward across these dark and uncharted waters.

TASK 3: Understand the political aspects and identify risks to be managed.

You will need to take a number of radical decisions that will deeply impact people’s lives and the local economy. There will be dilemmas and trade-offs involved, and you will have to decide with limited information—under time pressure. You may not always make the right decision, and some decisions will divide people. Securing and maintaining support for your political leadership from the public and stakeholders is critical.

To manage political risks, the following considerations are key:

- Your response team must include effective **structures for political response** and public communication as well as a practical response. Not every member of the team will want to address the political side, but the team’s work is inherently political, and political management is a core function.
- Bear in mind that the purpose of politics is to handle value conflicts. **The public invests authority to make decisions about values and priorities in its elected leaders**, and relies on them to bring the right people together for legitimate decision-making processes. Managing the unprecedented conflicts between priorities is one of the essential tasks of crisis management—your task in particular.

- In an emergency that cuts across organizational, jurisdictional, and level-of-government boundaries, it may be unclear who has a legitimate claim to decision-making authority for particular decisions. Senior officials should **address the conditions and procedures for delegating decision-making authority** upward or downward.
- With this slow-moving and invisible threat, **worry more about underreacting than overreacting**. Acting sooner rather than later may be politically painful in the present, but it is your responsibility to think ahead. Assume you are two weeks behind the curve with what you know and can observe at present.
- **Lean into the possibility of more restrictive measures early and often** in your public communications to start building credibility for these measures before you need them. As important as it is not to underreact or over-reassure the public, **acting too restrictively too early risks backlash** that can undermine the public's compliance with your response.
- **Give people the truth about what you know and don't know, and give them hope**. Think about what anyone would want to know: How many are sick? How many have been tested? How many fatalities are there? What's closed? What's open? What should they expect?
- **Place trust in your public**. Most people are at their best in a crisis and want to help. **Enlist their help**.
- **Establish a steady drumbeat in your communications**. Keep people informed every day at the same time.
- **Remind people of the things that they do not need to worry about** at present: There is enough food, there are no anticipated disruptions of electricity or water. Anxiety is high; take problems off their mental plate.
- While we are in a period of high uncertainty and will be engaged in a prolonged response to a slow-rolling threat, remind people that **what they do right now is important, and has implications for what happens next**. The situation is fluid and we're learning as we go. **It won't go right back to normal after two weeks, but neither will it stay the same indefinitely**.
- **Encourage resilience**: Invite creativity and imagination from people, artists, businesses, and social sector organizations. Urge them to think about the skills and capabilities they have and how those map to the situation as it evolves. Ask them to **spot opportunities** where they can help with physical needs, emotional challenges, and the sense of isolation. (Singing songs out of windows at 6 pm in Italy was a spontaneous, decentralized, and intuitive community response—and a beautiful one.)
- Think through how you will communicate with and respond to the needs of **specific populations**. For example, teens and twenty-somethings may erroneously believe they are not at risk and do not pose a risk to others.
- Assess the impact of the crisis from an equity perspective and have a **transparent planning process** around how you will provide for economically vulnerable constituents.
- Be especially aware of the **elevated needs of particularly physically vulnerable populations** (nursing home residents, people in homeless shelters, people in jails and prisons, etc.) that may not have a powerful or organized voice. Prioritize reducing physical proximity and density in shared spaces.
- Work across boundaries to **engage with local, state, and federal government as well as the private sector** to coordinate the response, align communication, and mobilize resources.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For information from the CDC on crisis and emergency risk communication, see <https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/>.

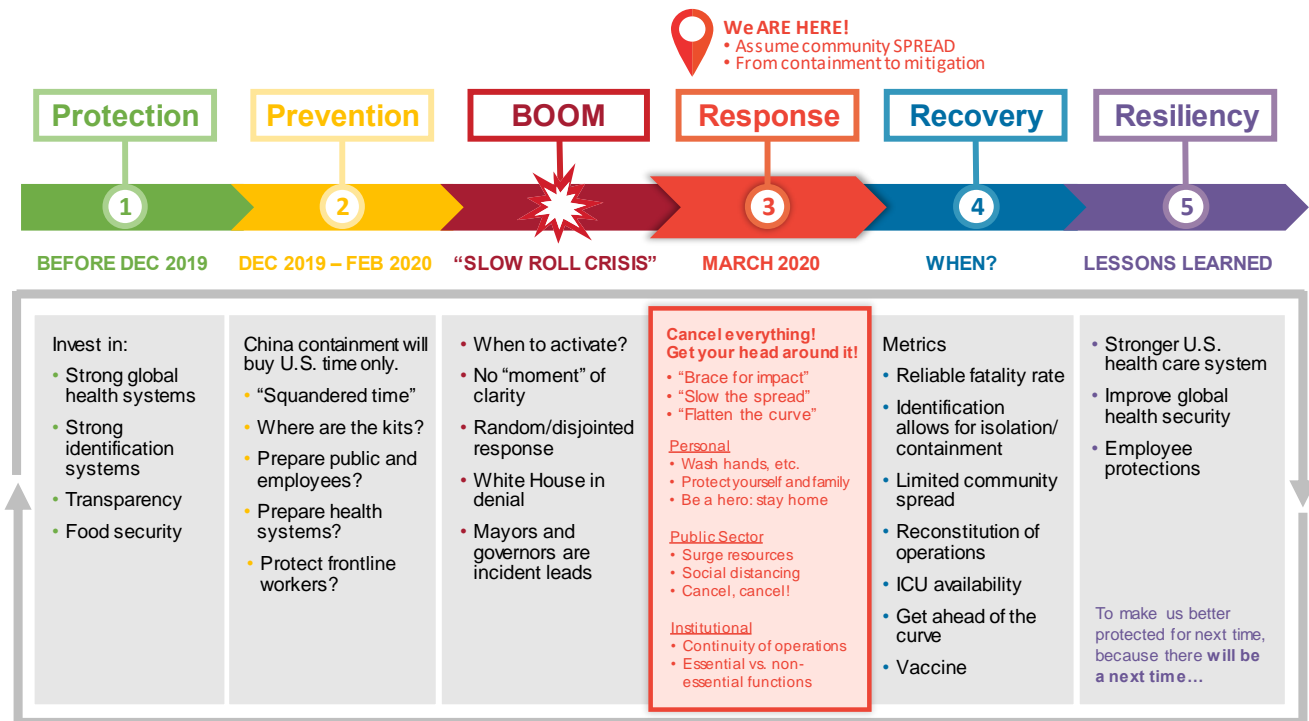
For further reading on crisis problem-solving processes, see “Crisis Management for Leaders Coping with Covid-19” by Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard, Arnold M. Howitt, and David W. Giles. (<https://bit.ly/2F2YOu5>)

“Effective leadership in a crisis situation is a good enough decision, soon enough to matter, communicated well enough to be understood, carried out well enough to work.”


–Leonard, Howitt, and Giles

The Five Stages of Crisis Management:

Coronavirus (COVID–19) in the U.S.



A CRISIS HITS A CITY AS IT IS, NOT AS IT WOULD LIKE TO BE.

The background of the slide is a detailed architectural floor plan of a building complex, rendered in a light yellow color against a dark red background. The plan shows various rooms, corridors, and structural elements, including what appears to be a large central hall and several smaller rooms and service areas.

Session Two

March 26, 2020

Communicating in a Crisis

with Juliette Kayyem and Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard

“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

—Admiral James Stockdale

WHY THIS CRISIS IS DIFFERENT

1. **Uncertainty:** We are dealing with a virus that is incompletely understood and continually evolving with unpredictable results. In response, we are taking unprecedented actions with unclear consequences.
2. **Ubiquity:** The global scale of this pandemic and the fact that we live in an interconnected and interdependent world means that ripple effects will continue to impact cities everywhere, even if or when the public health aspects are under control.
3. **Open-endedness:** We will not know to a moral certainty when adults can safely go back to the office and children back to school. From a public-health point of view, the pandemic doesn’t end until we have an effective vaccine that can be widely administered—perhaps 18 months or more.
4. **Pressure:** To contain the spread and the impact of the virus, leaders are making enormously consequential social and economic decisions. Pressure from those suffering economic losses will increase. You will be asked to predict the future, announce when things can go back to normal, or lift restrictions—even when that would put more lives at risk.
5. **Judgment calls:** It is too late to prevent tragedy entirely; our goal is to manage it within the limits of scientific progress and public tolerance. There will be many judgment calls to make. The challenge is to discover, innovate, and learn our way forward into an unknown future.
6. **Community:** The encompassing and protracted nature of this crisis will reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the formal and informal systems and structures in your city and test the character of the community you lead.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Your top goals for communication in this crisis are to convey **information** (transparent, trustworthy, consistent, and coordinated), **empathy** (for everyone affected), and **hope**.

1. Craft your communications thoughtfully. Consider:


- *Messagee:* Who are you trying to reach? Filter the message through their perspective on/understanding of the issue.
- *Message:* What exactly do you want to convey?
- *Messenger:* Who would lend the most authority, expertise, legitimacy, or political capital as the source of the message?
- *Messenger:* Who is the best person to deliver the message effectively to the messagee(s)?

2. Link facts, people, and values to desired actions and outcomes:

- Situation: *What is happening?*
 - ☞ Define and describe the event in the terms you want your stakeholders to internalize and respond to. How serious is it? How bad could it get? How long is it likely to last?
- Identity: *Who is this happening to?*
 - ☞ Be clear about who is included in the group you are defining. Who is particularly likely to be affected? Whose interests are you trying to understand and take into account?
- Values at stake: *Why should we care?*
 - ☞ Describe what you think is at stake. How will this event affect the things that matter to us most? What should we focus on preserving? What trade-offs might have to be made and what losses will we be asked to absorb?
- Action: *What should we do?*
 - ☞ What are the specific steps people should take? What should they do to reduce risk to themselves and others? What should they do if they have symptoms? Who are the experts they should listen to? What are the range of potential actions that government may take and what are the triggers for those actions?

3. Take communication very seriously. Keep these recommendations in mind:

- Don't "wing it." Prepare carefully and consistently.
- Coordinate with colleagues to ensure consistency in messaging.
- Say what you know and how you know it. Let the metrics lead the narrative.
- Be honest about what you don't know. Don't make predictions.
- Defer to experts and reinforce what they're saying.
- Don't cast blame. Look to reassure and build confidence.
- Say what you are doing and why, and be clear about what you are asking others to do.
- Show compassion for those who are sick, appreciation for those working so hard to respond, and empathy for those whose lives are disrupted.

The background of the slide is a detailed architectural floor plan of a building complex, rendered in a light yellow color against a dark red background. The plan shows various rooms, corridors, and structural elements, including what appears to be a large central hall and several smaller rooms and offices.

Session Three

April 2, 2020

Learning as Fast as You Can and Creating a Basis for Hope

with Juliette Kayyem and Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard

Resilience

1. **the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress**
 2. **an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change**
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary

FOSTERING RESILIENCE

The work you do to foster and build your city’s resilience now—even as the crisis unfolds—is essential for establishing the rational basis for hope. **Resilience is not an outcome, but rather a process** your city is already engaging in every day. Instead of using the passive “be resilient,” for this unprecedented moment, we may want to invent an active form of the word—the verb “to resil.”

Whether you are trying to figure out a new mechanism to deliver the necessary services the city was providing prior to this crisis or looking for a way to respond to an emergent need, here are a few key considerations on how to “resil”:

1. No one is coming to save the day. In a way, everyone everywhere has the same problem, but, in another sense, no other place has exactly the same challenges you have. You have to organize locally and quickly, develop strategies and processes to identify and deal with the sequence of challenges confronting the community, and waste no time in responding to them.
2. Work closely with local leaders who know their neighborhoods, the people, and the key resources they rely on. Building credibility in the midst of a stressful event may prove difficult; recruit the help of those who already have it.
3. A bottom-up community *organizing* approach is generally preferable to a top-down or expert-led community *planning* approach.
4. Put in place leaders and processes that embrace a highly adaptive approach that allows them to master, in sequence, a series of very different challenges.
5. Identify and establish strong working relationships with outside agencies (in the governmental, nonprofit, foundation, and corporate sectors) that can provide not just funding and physical resources but also training, advice, and assistance in planning and organizing.
6. The people in your community are your strongest asset for a resilient response. Keep an ear to the ground and jump on good ideas. Invite participation and do not underestimate how ingenious and eager to help people are. Your role is to facilitate innovation and help people with solutions to emerging problems get the resources they need to scale them up.

METRICS FOR THE “NOW” NORMAL

Wherever you are in the outbreak locally, the big-picture numbers look bleak at the moment. There is no such thing as a “safe county.” You may reasonably wonder if it is possible to extract a hopeful narrative from a pandemic still in exponential growth, but that is precisely the task before you.

The basic elements you will use to construct a narrative of hope are simple. New cases and deaths are just one part of the story. Every day, it is also your responsibility to tell people in plain language:

- What we’ve done since yesterday. *How are we better prepared to respond to the crisis today than we were at the last briefing?*
- What we are doing today. *What are we doing to help our neighbors right now?*
- Where we are heading tomorrow. *What are the challenges we anticipate and how will we rise to them?*

The things you are doing (and have done thus far) to respond are just a piece of the picture you want to draw for the public, however. You also want to remind people of what is not wrong. Build a “dashboard of hope” that points to the things that are running and functioning well in the “now” normal, for example:

- How many volunteers have provided meals for frontline workers?
- How many bags of groceries have been delivered to senior citizens?
- How many local businesses are hiring?
- How much money has your local COVID-19 relief fund raised?

This crisis is not just medical, and neither is the response. Work to get an integrated view of what is happening in your city, point people towards opportunities to help, and share the good news along with the bad.

Set the expectation that there won’t be a moment when your city simply switches back on, but rather that you will move forward together in incremental stages.

Invest in a robust public health response that will help ensure a steadier and speedier path forward.

We do not know what the “new normal” will look like, so we have to help our communities and one another live and lean into the “now” normal.

The background of the slide is a detailed, light-colored architectural floor plan of a building complex. The plan shows various rooms, corridors, and structural elements, all rendered in a consistent light beige or tan color against a dark red background. The layout is dense and intricate, covering the entire area of the slide.

Session Four

April 9, 2020

Addressing Stress and Mental Health

with Kimberlyn Leary

Stress:

1. a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation
2. a state resulting from a stress especially : one of bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium

—Merriam-Webster

WHAT MAYORS NEED TO KNOW

Like physical health, mental health is **complex and multifaceted**, with effects along a broad continuum of wellbeing. Stress and anxiety are universal human experiences—normal and adaptive responses that evolved to keep us safe from threats of all kinds. **Prolonged or severe stress**, however, can become **trauma**. Stress is **cumulative**. For those already under various pressures, the addition of a new source of stress may exacerbate distress.

The most stressful events are those that are **negative, uncontrollable, ambiguous, unpredictable**, and **require significant adaptation**. Even for those of us not dealing with the acute stressors of illness, death, and/or loss of income, stay-at-home orders and social distancing disrupt the usual ways we orient and stabilize ourselves—our routines, social interaction, and sense of mastery.

You may already be seeing evidence of a surge in the demand for mental health care:

- Among the **general population**, online resources like TalkSpace, BetterHelp, and the Crisis Text Line are seeing steep rises in new users, with people reporting feeling “terrified,” “overwhelmed,” “panicked,” and “paranoid.” A **survey by McKinsey and Company** during the last week of March showed a large majority of respondents feeling **anxious and depressed** and a significant uptick in **substance abuse**.
- **Healthcare workers** are especially vulnerable to the mental effects of stress at this time. In a **study out of China**, half of healthcare providers involved in COVID-19 response reported depression and more than a third had trouble sleeping.
- Social isolation and financial stress are also taking a toll on **families**, with **parents reporting** losing their tempers with their children frequently. Domestic violence is on the rise. These stresses are heightened for parents of children with disabilities and those with health vulnerabilities.

Multiple studies show that the mental health effects of stress related to disasters can **linger for months or years** following the event. (See graphic attached.) It may be decades before we fully understand the scope of the pandemic’s impact on mental and behavioral health.

The good news, however, is that stress-related mental health conditions are **treatable**—even under stay-at-home rules.

The WHO, CDC, and SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Health Services Administration) offer the following guidance for positive coping:

- 1) Adapt and use coping strategies that have helped you in the past.
- 2) Create new routines and stick to the parts that work.
- 3) Prioritize rest and nutrition.
- 4) Stay in contact with family and friends (online and by phone).
- 5) Look for opportunities to safely help others/neighbors.
- 6) Minimize COVID-19-related media exposure. Look for media reports featuring practical steps to take.

Guidance from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Guidance from the CDC

WHAT MAYORS CAN DO

There are a number of ways mayors can help the public deal with the stresses of this crisis. They can make a difference in four key ways:

Messaging

- Combine messages around physical separation with affirmations of alternative **social connections** (phone or online), e.g., through use of hashtags like #AloneTogether.
- **Acknowledge** the real concerns people face, especially financial strains.
- Amplify **positive and hopeful** stories.
- Speak directly to the stressors affecting **specific groups** (e.g., small business owners, healthcare workers, teens at home, etc.), including those who might otherwise feel invisible (e.g., people with disabilities).
- Keep messages **simple and accessible** for those with intellectual, cognitive, or psychosocial disabilities.

Augment Access and Capacity

- Expand **tele-mental health** as permitted and mandated by state and federal regulators, including through nonmedical helplines (pastoral care, stress management).
- Push out continuous updates of local, state, and national mental health **resources**, including crisis **hotlines and “warmlines”** staffed by peer volunteers.
- Work to connect **vulnerable populations**—especially the homeless and others with substance use and mental health diagnoses—with resources.
- Sponsor **innovation**.

Mitigate Stigma

- **Normalize** stress and mitigate stigma around mental health issues by speaking about mental health impacts inclusively (“we,” “us,” “all of us”).
- Use **mindful language** about COVID-19 (“people who have COVID-19” rather than “COVID-19 cases”).

- Encourage **help-seeking**.

Honor the Unspeakable

- Help communities **grieve** by speaking to losses.
- Acknowledge the **hardship** of being unable to mourn losses together.
- Support new **culturally-sensitive rituals**.

HOW MAYORS CAN BETTER RECOGNIZE AND DEAL WITH THEIR OWN LEVELS OF STRESS

You and your team are making an unusual number of unfamiliar and consequential decisions. Stress is normal and unavoidable, and it is manageable if you take the time to **recognize and respond** to it.

Utilize this **short checklist** for tracking your own stress levels:

- **Thinking:** Being easily distracted, unable to concentrate
- **Emotions:** Trouble relaxing, feeling irritable
- **Body:** Increase or decrease of energy, feeling restless, sweating, headaches, appetite and sleep changes
- **Behavior:** Blaming others or getting into frequent arguments

Bringing attention to your body and breath is the essential first step for calming the **physical stress response**. Only then can you begin to do the **cognitive work** of combatting anxious thoughts. Don't overestimate the danger or underestimate your ability to manage what comes your way. You cannot predict the future, but you can **sort problems** into groups and work on them one at a time, generating and testing solutions for problems on which you can exert some influence. **Accept** that some problems are beyond your influence.

It is vital to take care of your mental health at this time—not just for yourself and your family, but also for your team. You can help **support your team** in the following ways:

- Listen to and validate their concerns.
- Express confidence in their abilities.
- Increase supports for their mental health needs.
- Minimize uncertainty.
- Model self-care.

The background of the slide is a detailed architectural floor plan of a building complex. The lines are thin and light-colored, creating a grid-like pattern of rooms, corridors, and structural elements. The overall color scheme is a muted, dusty blue.

Session Five

April 16, 2020

Crucibles of Leadership: From Conflict to Collaboration with Howard Koh

“Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.”

—Barry Posner and James Kouzes

FACING CONFLICT

The most energy-intensive work you have to do as mayor involves **convening and collaborating** with others across departments, sectors, and levels of government. These efforts leave you and your staff working overtime to navigate tangles of **red tape** and manage **tensions** around resources and finances, turf, personalities, and access to power.

Leading collaborative work in the midst of an unfolding and evolving crisis *while keeping the urgent needs of your community front and center* strains the best of us, but it also offers **our best chance at an effective response and a resilient recovery**.

SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Since you were undoubtedly already seeking cross-boundary solutions for “wicked problems” in your community before this particular crisis hit, you already know that:

- Each wicked problem is a **unique** snarl of other problems, there are **no perfect solutions**, and progress is **slow** and halting.
- There is competition for **limited resources**.
- Different actors and stakeholders hold different **beliefs, opinions, and values**. There are different **communication styles** and preferences, different **interests**, and different **organizational cultures and assumptions**.
- There are concerns about **sensitivity** to different groups of historically disadvantaged stakeholders that can put everyone on edge.

All that is challenging in ordinary times. But when you drop it all into the exceptionally **volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous** (VUCA) environment the COVID-19 crisis produces, it is little wonder that tensions start to boil over, even when assuming the best intentions from everyone.

MANAGING CONFLICT

Broadly speaking, there are five approaches to consider regarding conflict:

- *Avoid* — ignore the conflict and take no action
- *Force* — use your formal authority without regard to the other party
- *Accommodate* — yield to the other party
- *Compromise* — identify a partially satisfactory solution for both sides

- *Collaborate* — cooperate with the other party **to understand their concerns** in order to find a **mutually satisfying solution**

The last option deserves special consideration in a time of crisis. The bad news is that it takes more time and energy than the others. The good news is that it gets you moving in the direction you want to go and ensures that **you don't have to go it alone**.

CROSS-BOUNDARY LEADERSHIP

The basics of cross-boundary leadership are straightforward: Your task is to build teams, solve problems, **and** get results. We can break those tasks down a bit more.

BUILDING TEAMS

- Work to **develop trust** among team members. Ideally, you can model trustworthy behavior to set the tone from the beginning. Ask yourself:

☞ How can I encourage empathy in this crisis?

☞ Am I listening to other perspectives?

- To **align motivations and values**, focus on the outcomes you are pursuing and who has the capacity and motivation to help you achieve them. Ask yourself:

☞ How do I identify and work with new, unexpected allies?

☞ How can I leverage different stakeholders' motivations/values/resources to create value?

- Be proactive in your efforts to **manage power dynamics and conflict**. **Jim Collins** warns against raising the importance of the task over the importance of “getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats.” Ask yourself:

☞ Who needs to be on the bus? In which seats?

☞ Who isn't being heard?

Everyone on your team is an individual with a unique set of strengths and weaknesses—including you. **Capitalize on that uniqueness**. Building trust means making the team a **safe place to take risks and make mistakes**. You can set the tone by **modeling vulnerability**, setting norms that ensure **everyone talks and is heard**, giving **credit to the team** when results are favorable, and **heading off attempts to lay blame** when they are not.

SOLVING PROBLEMS

- **Take a systems approach** to understand the problem through a wide lens. Ask yourself:

☞ How do I encourage each stakeholder to view the whole system?

- You are coming together to work on a problem collaboratively because the usual ways of working could not fix it. But that is just the beginning of innovation. **Foster innovation** at every step along the way. Ask yourself:

☞ How am I actively encouraging new ideas and solutions?

☞ How are we continuously improving (learning from failure)?

- Finally, you cannot manage the problem-solving process if you don't know what success looks like or whether you're making progress. If you are going to get anywhere, you have to **define success and use data**. Ask yourself:

- ☞ *What does success look like at the system level?*
- ☞ *What data would tell us we are making progress?*

Wayne Gretzky famously advised hockey players to “skate to where the puck is going, not to where it has been.” Parts of the problem you are trying to solve with your collaborative team will be familiar to some or all of you, but other parts are new and evolving, and **a flexible team itself represents an innovation in governance** around the problem.

To collaborate effectively, acknowledge that many or all of you are finding yourselves in **unfamiliar roles**, taking on **new responsibilities**, integrating **new values** into your understanding of the problem, and adjusting to **new ways of working**. Actively **seek out opinions that are different** from yours; **challenge your assumptions**. A good team practice to keep your eye on where the puck is heading rather than where it's been is to establish a weekly **“proactive hour” for brainstorming**.

ACHIEVING IMPACT

- One of the biggest (and most common) mistakes in efforts to tackle complex problems is a failure to **engage people directly affected by the problem**. Ask yourself:

- ☞ *How are we engaging those most directly impacted in problem solving?*
- ☞ *Do we understand what success looks like for those suffering the most?*

- Understand where your team has leverage and **use leverage points** effectively. Ask yourself:

- ☞ *Which levers have the biggest impact in the short term?*
- ☞ *Which levers have the greatest potential for improving the problem over the long term?*

- Finally, you will learn hard lessons and claim hard-won victories along the way. Don't let the lessons learned wither on the vine; **share your learning**. Ask yourself:

- ☞ *How am I communicating the story, and to whom?*
- ☞ *How do we acknowledge and celebrate progress and “quick wins”?*

To maximize your impact, have everyone on your team working to **identify resources**—human or otherwise—that are underutilized. Be honest and **transparent with the data** and what it means, but don't let disappointing or incomplete data tell the story alone. Share human stories to **connect emotionally** and demonstrate to the public that there is a **system** in place, **working hard to protect people**.

THE CRUCIBLE EXPERIENCE

This crisis has thrown each and every one of you into a crucible. You are being put to the test and strained to the limit. As Nelson Mandela reminds us, *“It always seems impossible until it's done.”* It will be some time before you can look back at this experience and see that you did the impossible. But whenever hindsight is possible, you will see that you walked through the fire, reframed adversity to create new meaning, and hopefully emerged stronger and more committed than ever to the values that called you to public leadership in the first place. **Self-doubt and vulnerability in this moment are inevitable, but so is growth.**

The background of the slide is a detailed architectural floor plan of a building complex, rendered in a light yellow color against a dark red background. The plan shows various rooms, corridors, and structural elements, including what appears to be a large central hall and several smaller rooms and offices.

Session Six

April 23, 2020

Learning from History to Act Now and Prepare for the Future: Leading through a Multi-Stage Crisis

with Nancy Koehn

“A real leader is somebody who can help us overcome the limitations of our own individual laziness and selfishness and weakness and fear and get us to do better, harder things than we can get ourselves to do on our own.” —David Foster Wallace

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ERNEST SHACKLETON’S POLAR EXPEDITION

In the middle of a public health crisis unlike anything you’ve seen before, you may be wondering why we’re talking about an Antarctic expedition that took place over 100 years ago. Even three months ago seems a world away. But that is precisely the point.

Shackleton sailed toward the South Pole with one mission in mind: to lead the first expedition across the Antarctic continent. Abruptly, he found himself and his crew facing a very different set of circumstances: an iced-in (and eventually sinking) ship and a slow-burn crisis that would play out over nearly two years, with peaks of intensity and peril—and many long, hard, tedious days and weeks in between. And yet, he managed the impossible, safely leading himself and his crew of 27 men through some of the most grueling physical and psychological trials in human experience.

In your cities right now you, too, are facing challenges nobody has seen before, and there is a gaping stretch of time and an enormous amount of work ahead before you can see light at the end of the tunnel. How can you lead your teams and your communities through the next 18 months?

LESSON 1: TASK MANAGEMENT AND MISSION LEADERSHIP

Shackleton recognized that his mission had changed utterly: from discovery to survival. He **defined the mission** clearly and committed himself to achieving it, but remained entirely **flexible** in his approach to doing so. Knowing that daily routines and tasks would help establish and keep order, he kept his crew busy and on task, but focused everyone’s sights on the long-term goal.

Strong leaders quickly get comfortable with widespread ambiguity and chaos. They commit themselves and their followers to navigating point-to-point through the turbulence, adjusting, improvising, and redirecting as the situation changes and credible information emerges.

Inspirational leaders charge individuals to act **in service of the broader community**. They give people jobs to do, remind them why their work matters and (in both word and deed) **prioritize helping others**.

Skilled leaders frame the stakes of the crisis, articulating what is at risk, the tradeoffs or biggest obstacles, and how we can overcome them. They stay on top of the managerial work of assigning tasks and monitoring performance even while making continual adjustments and effectively communicating the mission and the need to work together.

LESSON 2: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND TAKING RISKS

Shackleton took **full responsibility** for the situation he and his crew were in—and worked constantly to improve it. He met with himself every day, reflecting and cooking up the “mental medicine” that would keep his crew alive. He remained outwardly calm and focused on managing his team’s energy.

He made himself responsible for the **engagement, outlook, and cohesion of the team**. Prior experience had taught him that indecisive and insecure leaders put the safety of their people at risk. He knew leaders have to be prepared to make hard and unpopular decisions in service to a worthy mission and keep the team focused—even when the mission itself had to change. (In his words: *“Better a live donkey than a dead lion.”*)

Having the courage to wake up and be this kind of leader all day, every day, requires the **discipline** to keep your sights constantly trained on the future—not shying away from lessons learned, but never dwelling on mistakes made or past difficulties. (As he wrote in his diary: *“The Endurance sank today: I cannot write about it.”*)

Courageous leaders understand they will make mistakes along the way and they will have to pivot quickly as this happens, acknowledging mistakes and learning as they go.

Strategic leaders focus on the likely outcomes. They do not spend a great deal of time thinking or talking about the best- or worst-case possibilities, which are lower-probability scenarios. Work to cultivate this attitude and discipline not just for yourself but also for your team. Emphasize to your followers that you expect everyone—individually and as a group—to learn their way forward, to experiment with new ways of operating, to expect the occasional failure and then quickly pivot to a new tack, to figure out the future together.

LESSON 3: ACKNOWLEDGING FEELINGS AND MANAGING ENERGY

The most remarkable thing about Shackleton’s leadership is how seriously he took the task of tending to the emotional lives and energy of his team. His first order of business was to **ensure team cohesion** through shared activities, diversions, and productive work. He recognized that the psychological wellbeing of his team would decide whether they lived or died. Keeping alive the belief that they could and would survive was critical.

Shackleton kept close tabs on his team’s **morale**, identified the men who might undermine the group’s ability to maintain a positive outlook, and **pulled doubters in close**.

Serious leaders cultivate strong morale among their followers by keeping close tabs on **collective sentiment** and then responding as needed to shifts. They recognize that every crisis is also a battle for the hearts and minds of their followers, who ultimately hold the power to help solve the crisis or to disintegrate into division, discord, or worse.

Perceptive leaders address the fear of their followers without feeding it. **Collective determination, solidarity, and a sense of shared purpose** are indispensable elements of success, partly because they help dial down fear. Recognize that most of your employees are anxious about their health, their finances, and, in many cases, their jobs. Explain that you understand how scary things feel, but that you can work together to weather this storm. **Encourage resolve**.

LESSON 4: SECURE YOUR OWN MASK BEFORE HELPING OTHERS

Crises take a toll on all of us. They are exhausting and can lead to burnout. For those who lose loved ones, they are devastating. Keep your finger on the pulse of everyone’s energy and emotions and respond as needed—**beginning with yourself**. As a high-ranking executive commented before the pandemic, “If you as the leader flag, everything flags. Everything else, including your organization’s mission, becomes vulnerable.”


So, in these trying times, take good care of yourself, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Know when you are capable of being focused and productive, and when you need a break. Eat well, exercise regularly, spend time outdoors (six feet away from strangers), connect in person with your partner, kids, or pets and virtually with friends and extended family, plan for at least two device-free periods per day (of a minimum of 30 minutes each), and rely on other practices that help you get grounded.

It is worth remembering that this crisis presents a powerful opportunity for organizations and teams of all kinds to better understand their strengths and weaknesses, what really engages and motivates their people, and their own reason for being.

This difficult, turbulent time will surely someday be seen, in part, as a fertile, living laboratory in which courageous leaders were made, not born.

FURTHER READING

For further reading, please see Nancy Koehn's *New York Times* article on **Leadership Lessons from the Shackleton Expedition** and view her interactive **presentation** on the same subject.

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Session Seven

April 30, 2020

Taking Risks Responsibly and Innovating in Real Time: Possibility Government in a Pandemic

with Mitchell B. Weiss

FROM PROBABILITY GOVERNMENT TO POSSIBILITY GOVERNMENT

The COVID-19 crisis has made the previously unthinkable part of our new daily reality, forcing a huge number of **innovations and adaptations at every level of society**. As city leaders, you are at the helm of many of these changes, and you understand the risks and the stakes at play in the choices you make. How can you act now in a way that **maximizes learning and informs future action while managing risks**? What kinds of experiments drive innovation, and how can you face the challenges inherent in **experimenting “in public”**—with your constituents’ eyes on you, their money under your stewardship, and their lives and livelihood depending on you? How can you transform what was once unthinkable into **new understandings of what is now possible**?

Possibility Government is a different kind of government than we typically practice. Governments often confine themselves to questions of what is probable: What can we reasonably expect or do based on readily quantifiable information, resources currently at hand, and what we have seen work in the past? Probability Government is appropriate in places, but too often leads to middling outcomes. **Possibility Government is the pursuit of new programs and services that may only possibly work.** This means, they probably won’t work. This is the realm of the entrepreneur: Most new ventures fail. But the ones that succeed can be transformative.

Possibility Government is not new—it has always been a necessary feature of democratic governance—but it is especially necessary in the face of COVID-19, and it is a fact of public life at present. Much of what you are doing is untested, and **acknowledging to yourself, your teams, and your residents that some of what you are doing will not be successful is simply a recognition of reality.** At the same time, you can promise them that while you will pursue the merely possible, you will not waste time on the delusional.¹

Effective Possibility Government requires **a shift in mindset** on the part of public officials and the public. Elected and appointed public servants must engage in Possibility Leadership: sourcing, trying, and scaling new efforts. And residents must engage in Possibility Citizenship: permitting, encouraging, and co-participating in the development of these efforts. Possibility Government = Possibility Leadership + Possibility Citizenship. **We’ll all have to move together.**

GOVERNMENT THAT CAN IMAGINE, TRY, AND SCALE

If “Possibility Government” and “public entrepreneurship” are not to be the oxymorons skeptics make them out to be, we have to be effective in their practice. This requires public leaders to do at least three things: Generate new ideas, try them, and ultimately scale these efforts up to make a large and lasting difference.²

¹ Adapted from *The Possible, The Probable, The Delusional* by Eric Paley

² From *We The Possibility: Harnessing Public Entrepreneurship to Solve Our Most Urgent Problems* by Mitchell Weiss

Sourcing Ideas

- Cast a wide net for ideas. Bring in traditional experts, non-experts, and experts from other domains.
- Look to the crowd: Leverage challenges, competitions, and contests.
- Engage residents. Look for their workarounds. “Nothing about them without them.”
- Be most interested in the quality of the best idea that crosses your desk, not the average quality of all the ideas. More ideas + different ideas = better ideas.
- Don’t settle for “best practices” when “best” isn’t good enough.

Experimenting

- Maximize learning while minimizing the waste of resources and time. Follow five steps.³ (See appendix for detailed worksheet):
 - ☞ ENVISION: Set a vision, translate to a falsifiable hypothesis.
 - ☞ BUILD: Develop a “minimum viable product”—i.e., the smallest set of features or activities needed to test a hypothesis.
 - ☞ MEASURE: Run tests, using the real service with the real users.
 - ☞ LEARN: Was your hypothesis validated or not?
 - ☞ DECIDE: Persevere, pivot, or perish?
- Experiment *with* the public, not *on* them.
- Promise learning, not success.
- Consider portfolios of experiments, then aim high so the “wins” cover the losses.

Scaling

- Think about how you can use government as a platform: a way to bring individuals together in ways that create value for other individuals—and for the broader public.
- Work to generate positive network effects, where user two makes user one better off. Look to mitigate negative network effects, where users make each other worse off (e.g., congestion, fraud, etc.).
- Use four sets of tools to make your platforms function well: rules, process, software, and hardware.
- Generate and preserve trust in the platforms.

ORGANIZE FOR PROBABILITY AND POSSIBILITY; CRAFT AN “AMBIDEXTROUS” RESPONSE

Possibility is fraught in public organizations. Expectations are high. Risk aversion abounds. Trying things that will only possibly work cannot and should not be the sole strategy. Public leaders must keep an eye on the present

³ Adapted from “Hypothesis-Driven Entrepreneurship: The Lean Startup” by Thomas Eisenmann, Eric Ries, and Sarah Dillard

and the future; on doing what they already do well, and looking for new things worth trying. **The crisis response should combine possibility and probability approaches. “Ambidextrous” leaders can perform this mental balancing act.**⁴ They can also separate these approaches somewhat within their teams’ operations so that innovation streams can benefit from “cross-fertilization” with other parts of the organization, but neither approach suffers from “cross-contamination” by the other.

Pursuing new—and therefore risky—efforts is difficult in public life and especially difficult in a crisis. But **innovation cannot simply be left to the private sector or philanthropy.** Both can play key roles in catalyzing new efforts, but they cannot effectively solve public problems without the co-participation of governments. Governments are often better positioned to do this work, and they can lead meaningfully (as they have before) in the pursuit of novel approaches.

⁴ From *Lead and Disrupt: How to Solve the Innovator’s Dilemma* by Charles O’Reilly and Michael Tushman

Appendix

LEAN EXPERIMENTATION WORKSHEET*

1a. ENVISION: What is the solution you plan to work on?
(Be specific and concrete about the proposed solution.)

1b. LIST UNCERTAINTIES: Translate your vision to falsifiable hypotheses. What are you assuming to be true with this solution (that might not be) to make it work?

Demand/Need Uncertainties	Operations Uncertainties	Technical Uncertainties
Political Uncertainties	Financial Uncertainties	

2a. SELECT: Start with one hypothesis that is important to validate...and can be, with modest investments of time, money, etc. Circle it above.

2b. BUILD: What “minimally viable product” (MVP) could you build to test this hypothesis? Try to include the smallest amount of features/activities you need in order to get validated learning. Describe or sketch.

3a. MEASURE: Who could you test the MVP with? How? When?

3b. TARGET: What (quantifiable) result are you expecting?

4. LEARN: Is your hypothesis validated or rejected?

5. DECIDE:

PERSEVERE. You validated your hypothesis. What's the next uncertainty from your list that you want to resolve? How will you build an MVP to test it?

or PIVOT. Your hypothesis was rejected. Do you have an alternative approach—another, related, way to attack the problem that retains parts of what you have created and changes others?

or PERISH. Your hypothesis was rejected and you think there is no productive way forward. How will you communicate this to the team? To the public, if at all?

* This worksheet was created by Mitchell Weiss, based on the methodologies laid out by Thomas Eisenmann, Eric Reis, and Sarah Dillard in their "Hypothesis-Driven Entrepreneurship: The Lean Startup" HBS Note 9-812-095, July 2013.

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Session Eight

May 7, 2020

Towards Financial Resilience: Budgeting During COVID-19

with Linda Bilmes⁵

A PERFECT STORM

This pandemic has plunged your local economy and budget planning processes into a sea of **uncertainty**. Needs—and expenditures—are rising, revenues are plummeting, and a **liquidity crisis** looms. Budget shortfalls are a certainty, but their relative size and severity are unknown. The **lack of coordination** at the federal level has left cities and states to chart their own courses, and the patchwork approach only exacerbates the uncertainty.

The CBO is predicting budget shortfalls for states twice as high as they were following the 2008 financial crisis. States may not only cut aid to local governments but also impose additional charges and rules.

Many of the usual **tools** for raising revenues (e.g., increasing fees for parking, services, or utilities) are **unusable** for reasons both practical and humanitarian, and **uncertainty is roiling the municipal bond market**. It looks **unlikely that any further stimulus will be structured in a way that offers much help to local government**.

How can you produce a budget that responds to all that has changed, is changing, and will continue to change? How can you make informed **trade-offs**? What can you do in your role to provide **stability** amid the uncertainty?

PHASE 1: RESPOND

It is not enough right now to simply revise your budget; you must **reimagine** it. This means **questioning all your assumptions**, giving serious thought to **worst-case scenarios**, and **making adjustments** to your operating and capital budgets **as you learn** more from residents, business, and other levels of government.

Begin with a frank **assessment** of your situation:

- What are your short-term revenue losses?
- What are your short-term expenditure increases?
- Who in your community is suffering the most, and how can you provide relief?

Next, identify **critical tasks**:

- Create a team to coordinate budget-related tasks and manage hard decisions.
 - Identify urgent cash shortages.
 - Organize supports for high-priority sectors and underserved groups.
 - Communicate your priorities, decisions, and plans clearly.
-

⁵ Additional contributor: Fernando Fernandez-Monge, Senior Associate with the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative

To cut your budget strategically, in a way that is aligned with your priorities, embrace **activity-based budgeting**. Think about the **outcomes** you want and the **activities** you think will produce them, and **budget for those activities**. Resist across-the-board cuts. Departments may not share your priorities, or may slash the line item guaranteed to turn out the public in defense of their budget. Ask them to **break down their budget** by activities (for most departments, these are the tasks that involve direct contact with clients or customers), then:

- Suspend ongoing activities that are not making a clear contribution to your strategic priorities.
- Prioritize essential activities and eliminate or scale back those that are lower priority.
- Cut overhead costs aggressively.
- Look for opportunities for productivity gains.

Ask yourself:

- Are you budgeting appropriately for new and emerging essential activities during the crisis?
- Are there any possible new sources of revenue?
- Have you reviewed (and renegotiated) your contracts?

On the capital side, examine every item with the same rigor you bring to operations—every project and every lease in your portfolio. Are there opportunities for refinancing debt or extending borrowing capacity?

To produce a budget, plan for two scenarios: your **best guess** about what will happen based on what you know right now and your **worst-case** scenario. For each of these, think carefully and creatively about costs and revenues. Build both versions of the budget in a way that allows you to **update, revise, and recombine** them on at least a quarterly basis. Your budget is based on the information you have, and **information is changing fast**.

Use **microsamples** for forecasting purposes: Take a small sample of taxpayers and use surveys or focus groups to understand their needs, priorities, behaviors, and thinking around issues that will affect your bottom line. (This is how the CBO forecasts the effects of new changes in tax codes.) Use what you learn as a rough indicator, and incorporate it into your thinking and planning.

PHASE 2: STABILIZE

To begin stabilizing your city’s finances and your local economy, pay close attention to **three realms**: strategic cuts using activity-based budgeting (as described above); protecting city employees, small businesses, and underserved groups; and capital budgeting and debt refinancing.

Protecting the lifeblood of the community:

- Layoffs are a last resort. Don’t “cut off your arm to lose weight.”
- Include the needs and voices of the most vulnerable in decision-making.
- Convene focus groups of small business owners and ask them what they really need.

Paycheck Protection loans only provide for employee compensation. Local businesses need more than this to **reopen in a way that is safe and sustainable**. Now is the time to **think creatively** and to strengthen your relationship with these stakeholders.

There are **critical, proactive steps you can take in capital budgeting**:

- Lobby state and federal government to help lower your cost of borrowing as a critical part of stimulus spending.
- Engage with your investor community. Differentiate your bonds and sell directly to investors to reduce costs on both ends.
- Begin laying the groundwork for sustainable recovery. Communicate with your Chambers of Commerce regularly.
- Get together with other mayors in your state and ask state treasurers to transfer state cash from Wall Street to Main Street so you can seed investment in local communities.

Advocate at the state and local level for the next stimulus package to include money for every state to set up a state bank to lend to community banks that will invest in local businesses.

PHASE 3: TRANSFORM

Every crisis brings opportunities, and as the crisis winds down and you work to **rebuild a sustainable and resilient economy**, opportunities for new programs and new directions will come into view. A leaner operating budget and new partnerships to support future infrastructure projects provide a basis for transformation.

Leaner operating budgets:

- Departmental funds redirected to top priorities.
- Opportunities to reduce rents, increase telework and job-sharing.
- Operations reshaped in ways that advance sustainability and public health priorities.

New partnerships and infrastructure:

- Small businesses and community banks become more invested community partners.
- Regional partnerships become recovery engines.

This pandemic is the greatest public health crisis we have seen in our lifetimes. It is already putting you and your constituents under intense financial strain, and it may yet cause financial shockwaves worse than any you've previously experienced. But it is also an opportunity to reshape your city's priorities, get rid of what you don't need or no longer works, renegotiate or cut overpriced contracts, and scale down capital projects that no longer make sense.

It may be hard to see the light now, but much good has come out of past pandemics: Think indoor plumbing, public parks, and healthcare reforms. Adapting to the changes ahead won't be easy, but **don't doubt your power to make your city a better place on the other side of this crisis.**

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Session Nine

May 14, 2020

Leading Diverse and Dispersed Teams in Times of Crisis

with Amy Edmondson

TEAMWORK ON THE FLY

As you work to respond to and manage the evolving threat of COVID-19—and the ripple effects of efforts to mitigate it—you are constantly **reaching across boundaries, seeking out new expertise, and standing up new programs and processes**—all from behind a screen or a mask and across physical, cultural, organizational, and political divides.

This crisis thus challenges you to **adjust your instincts, your assumptions, and your normal working methods** all at once.

To lead your city through this time of upheaval, you must engage in “teamwork on the fly,” coordinating loose networks, teams, and task forces to **plan, execute, and learn—not sequentially but simultaneously**.

Many of you cited **collaboration and managing teams remotely** as the top challenges you currently face.

- What tools can you bring to these complex leadership challenges?
- How can you bring people together to act with urgency, absorb new knowledge, and adapt continually?

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE FOR EFFECTIVE TEAMING

Responding with agility to this multidimensional crisis means embracing the shift from forming and managing bounded teams **to inspiring and enabling “teaming”**—bringing together more temporary and fluid collaborative teams comprising the expertise and ideas you need to tackle new and emerging issues.

This work presents both **technical and interpersonal challenges**. You will have to navigate conflicting values and priorities, confusion or discomfort around chain-of-command issues and reporting practices, to say nothing of the general awkwardness of doing all this from a safe distance.

Neither traditional project management nor old-fashioned team-building practices translate very well in a rapidly evolving and unpredictable crisis environment. The differences are at least the following:

- You face many **unknowns**.
- You have to bring in different **expertise** at different times.
- You **lack** fixed roles and deliverables.
- You often have to do things that have **never** been done before.
- You have to **act** in order to learn.

Teaming is an iterative process of relating, experimenting, and problem-solving. **How can you organize yourself and your collaborators in ways that permit you to learn as you execute and plan as you learn?**

HARDWARE:

Traditional project management tools must be modified to enable agile execution, where **updating** occurs as you gain new information and experience. Err on the side of overcommunicating. The pace of work combined with working at a distance requires a heavier hand to ensure coordination or communication among partners.

Be explicit about tasks, actions and expectations.

Scope the challenge:

- Start to identify needed expertise and tap collaborators.
- Take on and assign new roles and responsibilities.
- Determine what resources are needed—recognizing that these will shift over time.
- Set tentative goals.

Structure coordination:

- Work to create light structures to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Clarify the interfaces between roles and responsibilities to identify points of intersection.
- Check in frequently and solicit feedback to ensure you are enabling progress (rather than micromanaging).

Sorting tasks:

- Prioritize reciprocal tasks (those that require back and forth discussion to make progress) to avoid creating bottlenecks and ensure that subgroups are coordinating as well as possible.
- DON'T assume everything has to be collaborative; not all tasks and decisions are team encounters.
- Delegate all tasks that can be done with minimal coordinating. Get yourself out of the way.

SOFTWARE:

While you cannot reap the benefits of working in close physical proximity right now, this moment of crisis may offer a few silver linings in terms of “software” challenges:

- You might not have to work as hard as you otherwise would to create **a sense of urgency and shared purpose**—but keep in mind that it is motivating to keep emphasizing the importance of the purpose.
- Shared recognition of everyone’s **vulnerability** to this threat can support psychological safety (and ideally build habits of care that we will all carry into the future). **Fear that is shared can be productive.**

Interpersonal Fear at Work	Fear Related to COVID-19
Subtle/Hidden	Obvious/Explicit
Experienced Alone	A Shared Experience
Concerned with What Others Think	Concerned with What We Can Do
Inhibits Innovation	Promotes Innovation

There are three key considerations for helping people get comfortable with new ways of working.

Purpose: A compelling shared purpose motivates efforts and overrides conflict.

- Remind everyone whose efforts you need what's at stake, and what role they play in helping to solve the problem.
- Bring together project participants to discuss “arguable” changes in scope.

Psychological safety: Psychological safety is a shared understanding that the context is safe for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or failures—and that everyone's voice will be valued.

- DO model the behaviors that encourage others to contribute in meaningful ways:
 - ☞ Ask thoughtful questions and acknowledge gaps in your knowledge. Convey awareness of your own fallibility.
 - ☞ Emphasize the novel, experimental nature of the work.
 - ☞ Clarify the legal context and what is and is not permissible.
- DON'T mistake niceness for psychological safety. Psychological safety is not:
 - ☞ Freedom from conflict.
 - ☞ A guarantee that all your ideas will be applauded.
 - ☞ Permission to slack off.
 - ☞ A license to whine or overshare.

Empathy: Perspective taking is a key enabler of effective teaming. You are managing a diverse group, and everyone has a point of view their collaborators can learn from. To encourage empathy:

- Invest upfront in cross-domain learning.
- Align teams around professional values and find common ground.
- Encourage everyone to share their thought processes in a spirit of inquiry.
- Force moments of reflection: “What might I be missing?”

THE PROBLEM-SOLVING ZONE

Psychological safety and courage are two sides of the same (precious) coin. **A culture characterized by psychological safety and courage is—and will continue to be—needed in this crisis** (and in a complex and uncertain world). If you can build this culture and act with urgency, your teams will rise to the challenge.

Urgency + Psychological Safety → Problem Solving



Bear in mind that **getting in the problem-solving zone starts with you**. Our own cognitive biases and fears, dysfunctional group dynamics, and political and organizational pressures can push us to downplay risks and delay action. The more you check your instincts and assumptions and let the urgency of the moment drive you toward action, humility, empathy, and learning, the more effective you will be in your response.

What's <i>instinctive</i> when facing uncertainty	What's <i>needed</i> in a crisis
Waiting for additional information	Acting quickly on what you know
Downplaying the threat and withholding bad news	Communicating with transparency
Doubling down to explain your actions more clearly	Taking responsibility and focusing on solving problems
Staying the course	Engaging in constant updating

The background of the slide is a detailed architectural floor plan of a building complex, rendered in a light yellow color against a dark red background. The plan shows various rooms, corridors, and structural elements, including what appears to be a large central hall and several smaller rooms and service areas.

Session Ten

May 21, 2020

An Uncertain Future: Scenario Planning in a Pandemic

with Rebecca Henderson

PLANNING AMID THE “BUZZING CONFUSION”

Change is hard under any circumstances. Often, for city leaders, the challenge is to drive change, but in this moment, **change is driving you**. The trillion-dollar question is, “Where is it taking us?”

Where will we be in six months? Or two years? What will the post-COVID-19 world look like?

Of course, no one has the answers, but you still need to plan for the future. To help order your thinking and conversations, you need a way to take key uncertainties into account. You need a way to describe and plan for some finite number of plausible futures. This is what **scenario analysis** is all about: mapping out those plausible futures and using them as the basis for your planning.

- In a culture that is resistant to change, risk-averse, and data-obsessed, **scenario mapping** is an underutilized planning tool.
- Instead of relying on business-as-usual assumptions or efforts to predict the future with quantitative analysis, this tool makes use of our most primal human talents: **imagination and storytelling**.

GRAPPLING WITH CHANGE

Right now, you can probably discern some clear **trends and trajectories**, read some inherent **tensions** between the lines, and spot a number of **threats and opportunities**.

But when you start to think and talk about the future, the sheer number of unknowns can set you spinning into an exponential curve of “what if...?”

How can you structure a lively and productive conversation about what happens next?

The goal of scenario analysis is not to make you any better at predicting the future. It is to help you **cope with uncertainty**.

Organizations that engage in scenario planning...

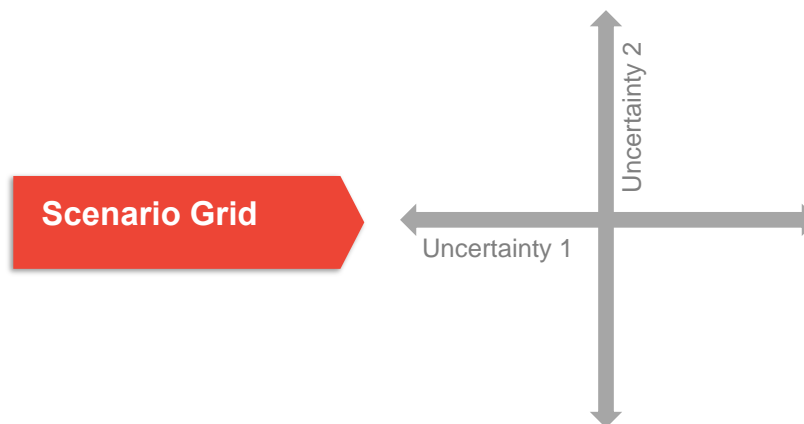
- Get the strategy “right.”
 - ☞ They develop a common vision of future challenges and a portfolio of **experimental efforts** to address them.
- Build an organization to support the strategy.
 - ☞ They allocate resources and time to new ventures and **manage the problem of things getting “worse before better.”**
 - ☞ They actively **embrace the tension** between entrepreneurial energy on one hand, and control and coordination on the other.

- ☞ They **invest in ambidextrous senior teams** who stay actively engaged at every step, managing and coordinating two complementary systems with different expectations, controls, and incentives.
- ☞ They **build deep cultural/emotional/values-based commitments** to adaptive organizational change and innovation.

THE BASICS OF SCENARIO PLANNING

Ask yourself: If a visitor from the future happened to drop in on your next team call, what would you want to know? The answer to this question is the start of your list of **uncertainties** and the first step in your scenario planning process:

1. Generate a list of critical uncertainties
2. Choose the two most critical. (Ideally, these serve as indicators for many of the others.)
3. Draw a “scenario grid.”
4. Name each of the four scenarios.
5. Estimate the odds of each scenario occurring.
6. Discuss with your team.
7. Iterate.



Bringing together the collective imagination, expertise, and experience of your team, scenario planning will help you:

- Structure the current confusion.
- Persuade those around you to prepare for several possible futures.
- Improve decision-making processes.

CONSIDERATIONS [from “Living in the Futures” by Angela Wilkinson and Roland Kupers]

Again, the goal of scenario planning is not to predict the future. Rather, the “value lies in how scenarios are embedded in—and provide vital links between—organizational processes such as strategy making, innovation, risk management, public affairs, and leadership development.” Wilkinson and Kupers offer a few important considerations:

- The plausibility of a given scenario is more important for planning purposes than its probability. Scenarios with a “logical story line” make it easier to apply judgments and intuitions.
- Scenarios should challenge assumptions about the status quo while leaving enough of what’s familiar intact for engaged planning.
- Make the story memorable, but discourage attachment to any one story.
- Limit the number of scenarios you consider, and avoid the temptation of creating a “middle path.”
- Use quantitative data and analysis to augment the narrative and explore different scenarios in finer detail, but don’t let the numbers take over the conversation.
- Involve outside stakeholders in scenario analysis to broaden expertise and strengthen relationships.
- Use scenarios as a mediation tool to encourage dialogue and manage disagreements.
- Integrate scenario mapping and analysis into strategic planning processes to better understand how your capabilities fit and interact with different possible futures.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

“Scenario Planning and Strategic Forecasting” by Jay Ogilvy in *Forbes*

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Session Eleven

May 28, 2020

Leading Through a Crisis: Lessons Learned and the Road Ahead

with Juliette Kayyem and Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard

LOOKING BACK: THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Time has been behaving strangely for many of us over the past few months. It is hard to believe we have done all we’ve done and been through all we’ve been through in such a short span of weeks. In our sessions together, we have thought and learned about:

- **Establishing agile problem-solving processes** for effective crisis response;
- **Communicating cold, hard facts with empathy** and grounding hope in reality;
- **Building community resilience** even as you respond;
- **Attending to your communities’ mental health needs**—and your own;
- **Managing conflict and collaborating** across boundaries;
- **Continually redefining your mission and taking responsibility** for team morale;
- **Generating ideas and managing risks** in innovation;
- **Budgeting and fiscal management** in a time of extreme uncertainty and scarcity;
- **Engaging in “teamwork on the fly”** to learn as you execute and plan as you learn; and
- **Envisioning and planning for multiple possible futures** to manage ambiguity ambidextrously.

Certain themes and refrains have become integral features of your daily response: communicating with **hope and numbers**, making decisions based on **data not dates**, finding **credible messengers**, prioritizing the needs of **the most vulnerable**, taking **the “now” normal** one day at a time, and continually **learning as you go**.

But with much still unknown, the virus still very much alive, and political fights simmering, you are probably looking to the next phase with no small amount of trepidation:

- *How can you pivot to other priorities while this crisis grinds on?*
- *How can you make sure community members understand their interdependence and look out for one another?*
- *How can you sustain and leverage the partnerships you’ve built?*
- *How can you provide the ongoing supports needed without any money coming in?*

REORIENTING: THE BEGINNING OF THE MIDDLE

You have worked valiantly to flatten the curve. The losses are real and painful, but the effort has not been in vain. Unfortunately, now comes the hard part: figuring out how to coexist with this virus—**how to begin to recover and respond at the same time**.

This will be a time of ongoing innovation and reform. You’ve been building your resiliency muscles—and probably discovering some you didn’t know you had. **Teaming, experimentation, and, above all, communication will only be more important** as you venture into this uncharted territory. Prepare for surprises.

Continuing to build trust with the community is essential. The people you serve must be able to rely on you to provide clear and credible information, a rational basis for hope, and empathetic leadership.

However, it may be time to **transition from an emergency response to more of a steady-state, maintenance-level response.** Whether it begins today or next month, think through how to orchestrate this transition:

- Start to bring in more voices.
- Amplify your most effective messengers.
- Give these messengers more airtime.
- **Establish a new “battle rhythm”**—every other day, then twice a week, and so on...
- **Gradually remove yourself from the center of the action,** but don’t stray far.
- Remember that you can always step back in (and you may need to).

As you move toward recovery, make sure you are working with a team that can handle uncertainty:

- Think carefully about how to maximize and sustain the productivity of the teams and people you lead.
- Ask them what resiliency muscles they have been finding and building over the past several months.
- Think together about how to **continue to improve your capacity to innovate and respond.**
- The answer to the questions you will face will continue to be **an agile, iterative process.**

Learning as you go means creating **time and space for reflection** on your own and your city’s response thus far. What did you overestimate? What did you underestimate? What took you completely by surprise?

If being a part of this **community of practice** has been valuable to you, consider whether you might be able to build and/or support similar models at the local or county level.

LOOKING AHEAD: MUDDLING THROUGH THE MESSY MIDDLE

There’s no way around the messy middle. In all likelihood, flare-ups if not outbreaks—blips if not waves—are coming. Testing and contact tracing at current levels may not be sufficient to contain the spread of the virus in your community. Surveillance testing and tracing, even if you have adequate capacity (which most places currently do not), are a tough sell. There will be more cases—and deaths. Misinformation and conspiracy theories will live on. Strive to maintain your credibility as a source of accurate, timely situational awareness and guidance for your community.

The best you can do under the circumstances is **remain vigilant and prepared:**

- Figure out the **metrics** to watch and stay in close contact with the people who hold information that can act as an **early warning system.**
- Have a plan in place with **concrete steps** you will take in the event of a resurgence

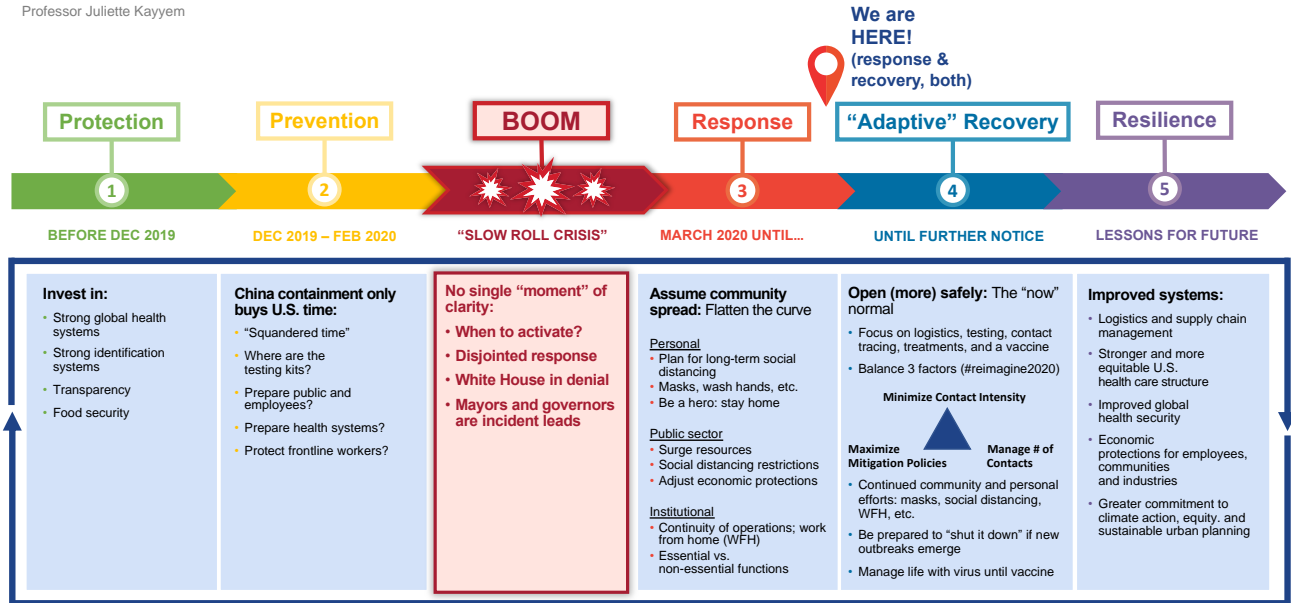
Our best hope for a final exit from this crisis lies with an effective **vaccine.** The timeline remains uncertain, but whenever a vaccine does become available, there will be an initial shortage. You and your team can get to work now on:

- Thinking through the logistics of distribution.
- Establishing an ethical approach to prioritization.
- Developing a communications strategy.

Finally, this virus has exposed and exacerbated **deep inequities.** At times, it feels almost engineered to exploit our weaknesses, but it also has much to teach us about ourselves and our capacity for resilience—and we cannot afford to waste the opportunity it presents to **build back better,** to try and fail and fumble and learn our way towards a more **sustainable, equitable, and just** social order.

The Five Stages of Crisis Management: Coronavirus (COVID-19) in U.S. Cities

Professor Juliette Kayyem



"A CRISIS HITS A CITY AS IT IS, NOT AS IT WOULD LIKE TO BE"