

Transcript | How to Think Strategically on a Full Schedule

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00:00:19.120 --> 00:00:32.029

Nigel Smith: Hi, everybody. Welcome to this panel on how to think strategically on a full schedule. My name is Nigel Smith, I'm the learning strategist here at Apolitical.

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00:00:32.030 --> 00:00:43.900

Nigel Smith: It would be really, really great just to hear from all of you before we start, so do please just post in the chat where you're joining from, what organization, you work for.

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00:00:44.990 --> 00:00:57.439

Nigel Smith: Today, we are going to discuss how to carve out time for strategic thinking when the pace of work feels overwhelming. We're going to explore ways to shift out of constant delivery mode.

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Nigel Smith: Something very common for all of you working in government, how to create space for long-term planning and prioritize the work that leads to real impact.

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Nigel Smith: We're going to be drawing on examples and proven techniques from the public sector, and our speakers will share how to build breathing room into your schedule, even when time feels impossible to find. On that note, thanks so much just now for joining us and making some time out of your busy schedules. We really appreciate it. For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, very warm welcome.

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00:01:29.080 --> 00:01:49.569

Nigel Smith: As you may know, AP Political is the world's largest network for global government. We're used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policy makers from more than 170 countries. And our mission is to make government smarter, and we do this by equipping public servants worldwide with the knowledge and skills that they need to lead

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00:01:49.570 --> 00:01:54.140

Nigel Smith: change. So let me just have a little look at,

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00:01:54.850 --> 00:02:11.279

Nigel Smith: some of the people who we have got here, loads and loads of people. Heather from Winnipeg, I told Pablo, our colleague from Canada, that we have some... plenty of Canadians, and proved to be right. Akhil from Malaysia, Caroline working in London.

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00:02:11.280 --> 00:02:16.389

Nigel Smith: More people working in the UK, somebody else from Ontario, Brighton in the UK,

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00:02:16.500 --> 00:02:21.789

Nigel Smith: Colorado, Amy from Colorado in, Littleton, Colorado.

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00:02:22.140 --> 00:02:29.570

Nigel Smith: I think I've been there on holiday. Another somebody else from the US, Dre from Austin. So, as you can see,

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00:02:29.830 --> 00:02:34.620

Nigel Smith: A broad range of people from all over, the world.

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00:02:35.120 --> 00:02:54.779

Nigel Smith: So we're also thrilled to extend an invitation to our Life in Government community. This is an online space to connect with peers working in governments around the world, so very much a place where you can continue the conversation that we're having today, meet some of the people who you can see introducing themselves in the chat.

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00:02:54.780 --> 00:03:17.090

Nigel Smith: And really, it's a place to join, to exchange ideas on managing workload, creating space for strategic thinking, and building habits that support long-term impact in government. And the link to that is in the resources tab at the bottom of your screen, and my colleague is also posting a link in the chat. So, I would love to see your voices and

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00:03:17.090 --> 00:03:20.770

Nigel Smith: Continue the conversation, there after our session today.

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00:03:20.850 --> 00:03:24.720

Nigel Smith: Got a couple of technical notes to get out of the way before we move into the conversation.

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00:03:24.990 --> 00:03:44.559

Nigel Smith: This event is being recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available, and they can be toggled on and off in your screen settings.

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00:03:45.030 --> 00:03:57.849

Nigel Smith: So, before we introduce our speakers, I'm just going to run through a few quick polls, just to get a sense of where you're coming to today's conversation first. From, sorry. So, let's just have a look at the first poll.

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00:03:58.590 --> 00:04:21.109

Nigel Smith: When your schedule is completely full, what is your go-to strategy to make time for strategic thinking? So the options, block out calendar time, think on the go, delegate or delay something. Honestly, I don't find the time, or something else. And if you have something else as your answer, by all means, pop that in the chat.

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00:04:28.750 --> 00:04:35.350

Nigel Smith: So, hundreds of you responding. We've got almost 300 people, in the session, today.

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00:04:35.800 --> 00:04:42.850

Nigel Smith: Fairly... Evenly spread, although we've got a... a clear...

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00:04:43.050 --> 00:04:59.220

Nigel Smith: A clear... well, a marginal winner. Looks like, so, 39% thinking on the go, so walking, commuting, and then in second place, blocking out time in the calendar and fiercely guarding it. That's the... that's the trick, fiercely guarding, that time.

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00:05:00.000 --> 00:05:03.219

Nigel Smith: Okay, moving to the second, poll.

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00:05:04.510 --> 00:05:21.590

Nigel Smith: The second poll question, what is the biggest barrier to making time for long-term strategic work in your role? And again, if you think of something we haven't listed, just do pop your chat... pop your response in the chat.

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00:05:21.690 --> 00:05:31.150

Nigel Smith: So the choice is constant reactive demands, limited staffing or resources, lack of support, difficulty prioritizing, Something else.

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00:05:36.300 --> 00:05:39.359

Nigel Smith: Oh, this one's much more clear-cut, it looks like.

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00:05:43.840 --> 00:05:54.480

Nigel Smith: Okay, so a clear winner, 59% constant reactive demand, so I'm sure that is something that we will, get to,

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00:05:54.890 --> 00:05:57.880

Nigel Smith: As part of our conversation.

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00:05:59.110 --> 00:06:10.869

Nigel Smith: So, really appreciate you taking part in these polls. Now to introduce our speakers, we are very fortunate to have two brilliant speakers, Pablo Sabrino and Belinda Wood, joining us today.

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00:06:10.870 --> 00:06:33.549

Nigel Smith: Pablo began his public service career with the Canadian Coast Guard, later holding senior roles across departments including fisheries and Oceans, Canadian Heritage and Public Works. He served as Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy, Planning and Corporate Affairs at Canadian Heritage. After retiring from the Canada School of Public Service, he continues to advise federal departments on leadership and strategy.

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00:06:34.100 --> 00:06:42.919

Nigel Smith: And Belinda. Belinda is Director of Strategy Execution Advisors, where she specializes in delivering solutions that create meaningful, positive impact.

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00:06:42.920 --> 00:07:06.229

Nigel Smith: She advises governments and public interest organizations on improving outcomes through effective strategy execution. Previously, Belinda served as a senior member of a delivery unit in a South African provincial government, and has developed strategies in areas including the green economy and education. And you can read full bios by visiting the resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen, and then you can go to the speaker's

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00:07:06.230 --> 00:07:10.619

Nigel Smith: section. So before we launch into the conversation.

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00:07:10.910 --> 00:07:24.009

Nigel Smith: I thought we would start with just a quick icebreaker question to our guests, just to get us warmed up. So, Pablo and Belinda, imagine you've got a full day for strategic work.

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Nigel Smith: clear schedule, no competing demands. Where are you working, and what might you be listening to, to kind of get you in the zone, and what's going to work best for you? Maybe let's hear from Belinda first, and then Pablo.

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00:07:37.660 --> 00:07:48.639

Belinda Wood: Thanks so much, Nigel. A simple answer, I would be sitting somewhere where I could see some nature, and I'd be having the new Florence and the Machines album playing. Thanks.

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00:07:51.260 --> 00:07:57.310

Nigel Smith: Awesome, love. I don't know if that's for the music or the, or the lovely nature setting.

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00:07:57.790 --> 00:07:58.600

Nigel Smith: Public.

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00:07:58.850 --> 00:08:10.689

Pablo Sobrino: Thank you, Nigel. So I had the whole day, which is special, so I would probably be listening to some quiet classical music. I would be spending my time reading, and then making notes.

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00:08:10.690 --> 00:08:20.360

Pablo Sobrino: And finally kind of putting the thoughts together, linkages together in a mind map. So that's kind of what... how I would spend that day. And it would be a very special day.

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00:08:20.360 --> 00:08:41.779

Nigel Smith: And probably, I'm sure, your busy schedule's a very rare day as well. Wonderful. Do, if you've got a moment, those of you on the call, same question to you, you know, I'd love to hear your responses, post them in the chat, just imagine, that dreamlike scenario with no distractions and a full day to,

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00:08:41.780 --> 00:08:44.680

Nigel Smith: Clear the... Clear the decks and think about.

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00:08:44.940 --> 00:08:52.170

Nigel Smith: your strategic work. See if anybody's have a quick look, if anybody's... Posted...

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00:08:55.450 --> 00:09:08.560

Nigel Smith: There's actually quite a lot of Florence of the Machine chat here, Belinda. Outdoor cafe with good music, delicious coffee, and treats. Somebody kayaking! Wonderful. Yeah, combo of nature and music, although soft jazz for Nick.

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00:09:08.560 --> 00:09:16.179

Nigel Smith: Rather than classical. Going for a walk? Brilliant. Do keep an eye on those, maybe we'll come back to some of those, later.

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00:09:16.730 --> 00:09:37.560

Nigel Smith: But really, let's move on from me, jabbering away. Without further ado, I'm going to hand over to Pablo and Belinda for the next 30 minutes. They're going to share some of their insights, experience, thoughts, and then we should have, plenty of time for Q&A, and hear from you,

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00:09:37.560 --> 00:09:42.210

Nigel Smith: Towards the end of the session. So, pablo, over to you first.

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00:09:42.340 --> 00:09:54.100

Pablo Sobrino: Thank you, thanks very much, Nigel. So... so I was asked, for this session, I'm trying to give some practical solutions to, to the problem of actually finding time to do strategic thinking.

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00:09:54.120 --> 00:10:11.989

Pablo Sobrino: So, how to find that magic day. So first of all, I'd just like to say we all have 168 hours in a week, nothing's changed, that's fixed, and so the time has to come from that. You need at least 56 hours of sleep time, and I tell you that to think clearly, you need sleep.

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Pablo Sobrino: So that's one element, and sleep is also a good place where some of your thoughts can come into being when you wake up. You have, then, about 40 hours of work time. Many of us, I laugh a little bit because sometimes that's 60 hours, but anyway, 40 hours of work time is what we have. And the rest of the time is your private time, and that's the time to do the things that, things like getting to work, things like having dinner, all that stuff.

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00:10:36.920 --> 00:10:47.680

Pablo Sobrino: So how do we find time in that 40 hours? And I've spent the last 10 years since I actually... when I retired from my full-time work, I've been spending my time coaching.

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Pablo Sobrino: And doing leadership development, and so this... these are a couple of the ideas that I have, developed, and shared. They were practices that I had, and, but I... in the training, I was able to kind of, demonstrate how you might actually do this. So, freeing up time in your calendar.

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Pablo Sobrino: So the thing I'm gonna ask, and this is what I ask a lot of people to do, is look back on your calendar the last 3 weeks.

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00:11:14.400 --> 00:11:19.749

Pablo Sobrino: And in those 3 weeks, Did I need to be at every one of those meetings?

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00:11:20.460 --> 00:11:23.829

Pablo Sobrino: Did I want to be at every one of those meetings?

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00:11:24.190 --> 00:11:26.899

Pablo Sobrino: And do I know why I was at the meeting?

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00:11:27.290 --> 00:11:40.270

Pablo Sobrino: And I want you to mark on the meetings, and I... this is old school, I actually like people to print the calendar out, and use a highlighter. And highlight the ones that you needed to be there and wanted to be there.

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00:11:40.730 --> 00:12:00.610

Pablo Sobrino: All the other ones, why am I here? Why did I get invited to this meeting, who sent me to this meeting? Those ones you start to mark in yellow, and the meetings where you got absolutely nothing, where you didn't contribute anything, you didn't get anything out of the meeting, mark those in, pink, or...

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00:12:01.050 --> 00:12:03.240

Pablo Sobrino: Those are the meetings you shouldn't have been at.

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00:12:03.490 --> 00:12:23.149

Pablo Sobrino: The ones that are in yellow, that the ones that, it was useful, but not really where you really contributed a lot, that's where you might delegate. So if you're a manager, you might delegate that to someone, or you might ask someone to take notes at the meeting for you, or to give you a quick debrief at some point in the future. And then the ones you need to be at.

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00:12:23.150 --> 00:12:27.619

Pablo Sobrino: you go there. So that is kind of the... my...

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00:12:27.690 --> 00:12:30.999

Pablo Sobrino: Approach to actually finding time in your calendar.

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00:12:31.320 --> 00:12:36.090

Pablo Sobrino: In the question, in the polling, one of the... one of the answers was.

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00:12:36.330 --> 00:12:42.329

Pablo Sobrino: protect your time. So, strategic thinking is actually something you have to do.

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Pablo Sobrino: And you have to do it no matter what level in the organization you are. You've got to find that time and protect it. And that is a meeting that you would mark as, I need to do. Now, we're going to talk about how you use that time, because you actually have to turn off your email, your messaging, your Slack, your Teams, all that stuff has to be turned off.

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Pablo Sobrino: So that you can actually use that hour. And I'll talk a little bit more about that later.

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00:13:06.950 --> 00:13:17.590

Pablo Sobrino: So this just transitions over to time blocking. So I'm a big believer in time blocking, and even in my leisure time, I block my time.

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00:13:17.770 --> 00:13:21.869

Pablo Sobrino: And time blocking is that every minute of your workday

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00:13:22.200 --> 00:13:30.700

Pablo Sobrino: has a function. It has something... something needs to happen in that. It has a role to play, that hour in your workday, that minute in your workday.

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00:13:30.750 --> 00:13:46.090

Pablo Sobrino: Block the time off to do a particular job, and focus on that job. So, a lot of you, and this is the nature of the world today, are in the reactive mode. Block time for being reactive. Block time for doing your email.

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00:13:46.590 --> 00:13:48.730

Pablo Sobrino: When you first start blocking time.

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00:13:48.820 --> 00:13:52.019

Pablo Sobrino: You will be, overly,

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00:13:52.090 --> 00:13:59.970

Pablo Sobrino: optimistic about how much you're gonna get done in that time. And so part of the exercise is learning what you can actually do in that time.

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00:13:59.970 --> 00:14:21.970

Pablo Sobrino: Now, Belinda's going to talk about prioritization, and so she'll talk about when I've opened up that time. I'm going to make a recommendation of a book that I find useful. I recommend to everybody that I talk to about time blocking, and it's an author from the United States, from Georgetown University, and it's Cal Newport, and his book is called Deep Work.

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Pablo Sobrino: And, it's available wherever, and I think you can actually get it as an audiobook. But in there, he talks about how do you get focused time. And so I'm a big believer in kind of the approach that he has. There are many, many

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00:14:38.390 --> 00:14:48.640

Pablo Sobrino: books about time blocking, but I like the way he thinks about it. And finally, you need to have a clear understanding

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00:14:48.780 --> 00:14:59.299

Pablo Sobrino: of when I'm going to do strategic thinking, what it is that I'm actually thinking about strategically. So... so that... that... when you're blocking off that time. Now.

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00:14:59.550 --> 00:15:08.930

Pablo Sobrino: One of the dangers is that when you block off time for yourself, everybody else thinks they can put a meeting in there, including your assistants, your boss, everybody.

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Pablo Sobrino: So what I did, and this is... and I did this at various levels, I actually booked meetings with people at that time.

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Pablo Sobrino: And...

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Pablo Sobrino: told them that they didn't have to come to the meeting, and so it was Entre-new, so they actually had time blocked off that was free time, and I had time, and it was a meeting, and so people don't interfere with that meeting time.

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00:15:30.370 --> 00:15:42.099

Pablo Sobrino: So, if there are any bosses listening right now, this is a trick that your staff should be using. So, anyway, I'm going to hand it over now to Belinda, because I've freed up some time, and Belinda's going to talk a little bit about what you might do at that time.

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00:15:42.650 --> 00:15:56.710

Belinda Wood: Thanks so much, Pablo. And as mentioned in the introduction, I'm a formal civil servant, and a current advisor on Center of Government Reform. And you're probably asking yourself, what is center of government reform?

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Belinda Wood: And it really is when a leader wins in an election, and they want to then realize those election promises and achieve impact.

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Belinda Wood: That really matters, to people and to citizens on the ground. I advise governments on... government leaders on how to do that.

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Belinda Wood: And the center of government reform is really about focusing on the delivery of priorities that will transform both the way government can work and the impact that it will have on citizens.

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Belinda Wood: And Pablo covered the sort of practicalities of how to schedule in time strategic thinking.

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Belinda Wood: And I'll unpack some of the tools that you can use when that time has been allocated, you're sitting down in whatever environment is good for you, and what kind of approaches and tools we can use

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00:16:45.840 --> 00:16:55.270

Belinda Wood: In that particular instance. And it's really been inspired by our work on center of government reform, with... in the center of government.

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Belinda Wood: So, as we said, you've blocked off some time. Thank you, Pablo. So let's identify an issue you're currently trying to resolve.

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Belinda Wood: This would be any issue that citizens see and feel and are immensely frustrated by. So, as a public servant, there are plenty of these. I'm just thinking of a few that are relevant to the environment I find myself in. Potholes in the road.

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00:17:19.500 --> 00:17:31.850

Belinda Wood: trains that don't run on time, or maybe intermittent power outages. Those are things that are very particular to the country I'm in. And during this session, I'm just going to take you through 3 steps.

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Belinda Wood: To follow when you're trying to find a solution to the problem that you've identified. Pablo already alluded to this, but when you are in that deep

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Belinda Wood: Deep strategic thinking. The first thing you want to do is prioritize.

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Belinda Wood: Of all the solutions to, the problem that you have identified, where is government, and you in particular, going to spend its efforts?

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Belinda Wood: Governments, what we found, are often quite reluctant to set explicit priorities, but given the finite number of resources that they have.

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Belinda Wood: somehow things get prioritized. It's either prioritization is forced, because you've got a crisis on the particular day, or you, which is far more strategic, you, go through a conscious process of priority setting.

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Belinda Wood: And so when you do want to go through priority setting, there's just a couple of things to think about when you are going through that process, and that I would really encourage you on. The first is.

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Belinda Wood: Identify the potential solutions to your problem. List them. No solution is off-limits.

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Belinda Wood: Then you want to really go through an exercise of prioritizing those solutions. I use a prioritization matrix. It's very simple. On the one axis, you have impact, high and low, and on the other axis, you have ease of implementation. Again, easy to implement or difficult to implement.

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Belinda Wood: You then want to... I suggest that you then map those particular, solutions on that matrix, and you want to end up with the solutions where you are... where they are easy to implement and have a high level of impact.

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00:19:09.590 --> 00:19:16.240

Belinda Wood: And from there, you would have a refined basket of solutions, and therefore priorities to work on.

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Belinda Wood: You'll then go through a process of having coordinated and structured discussions with the relevant stakeholders, but I think that's, from a prioritization perspective, that is one of the tools and ways that I would suggest you go about that.

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Belinda Wood: When you've gone through that exercise, just something to bear in mind, and a few tips on, you know, bearing in mind that strong priorities usually include some key features.

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Belinda Wood: The first is that they are selective. If everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority. That would be my first tip. The second is they need to really be... your priorities really need to be expressed as outcomes for citizens, not

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Belinda Wood: government outputs. So, passing a bill means very little to a citizen. I'd rather articulate the change, in the way that the citizen can see or feel the difference. So, for example, will the passing of that bill lead to more, access to potable water, as an example?

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Belinda Wood: The third aspect is that a good priority has sufficient focus

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Belinda Wood: And it's truly guided by action. So, another example would be education... a priority listed as education would be far too broad. What about education? Are you really looking at? Are you looking at reducing dropout rates, improving student performance? What aspect of that priority are you, are you looking at?

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00:20:41.400 --> 00:20:52.720

Belinda Wood: And then finally, and most importantly for priority, it really needs... you need to have a priority identified that has measurable targets. It's really key that you are able to measure what you're trying to do.

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00:20:53.130 --> 00:21:11.150

Belinda Wood: The second suggestion that I would make is once you've... so you're in that deep strategic thinking time, you've managed to identify the priorities that you are wanting to work on. The second is you need to be able to draw the delivery plan, or the delivery chain for that particular, selection.

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Belinda Wood: Detailed planning is obviously critical when you're delivering on priorities, and particularly in government, any kind of priority relies on multiple stakeholders. It's very rare that one entity or department would deliver on a particular complex sequence of interconnected activities.

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Belinda Wood: So, you really want to draw together a plan that really explicitly indicates who needs to do what, and by when, and using which resources.

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00:21:41.140 --> 00:21:47.469

Belinda Wood: We use something called a delivery plan to map this out, and it really notes the interconnected activities.

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Belinda Wood: In government circles, often relying on something called the theory of change, which is a technical, obviously, M&E term, but really shows the causal pathways between various components of a policy intervention. What is your input leading to? What activities are you getting at? What are the particular, outputs and then outcomes?

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00:22:08.160 --> 00:22:22.759

Belinda Wood: And you want to spend some time mapping out that delivery chain and delivery plan for your priority. You want to focus on the end outcome and work backwards, and not necessarily focus on a particular institution.

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Belinda Wood: So, as an example, you want to draw a delivery chain mapping out the interconnected activities to deliver school textbooks to all grade 10 learners, rather than, what is the Department of Education doing in that space?

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00:22:36.790 --> 00:22:55.160

Belinda Wood: So that would be my second tip. It really is quite useful for being able to clarify the responsibilities of all those stakeholders, and particularly the interfaces between the stakeholders, so you can ensure, quite importantly, accountability, and making sure that you don't have any loose ends.

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00:22:55.640 --> 00:23:13.020

Belinda Wood: And moving on to the third aspect that I wanted to cover here, once you've prioritized, you've pulled together the plan, you then need to, really enact that third element of strategic thinking, which is how can you think about real-time monitoring and performance tracking?

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Belinda Wood: It really is the basis for being able to know if your plan is going according to plan, and if it's not going according to plan, what you can do about it.

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Belinda Wood: So, and as part of that, you really want to institute, and I would encourage you to institute, a set of routines that accompany that particular priority. You're delivering on that priority, and then you're using a routine to really gather together all the relevant stakeholders to be able to answer the question.

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Belinda Wood: Are you delivering as you said you would deliver?

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Belinda Wood: And if you're not, you know, how do we need to shift what we've said we're gonna do? How do we shift it appropriately? And how do we navigate that with all stakeholders?

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Belinda Wood: I really, appreciated we were given access to some of the pre-questions that were submitted by this community in advance of the session.

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Belinda Wood: And there was one question that really struck me. It said, what are the most effective ways you've seen teams shift from reactive delivery to proactive strategy, especially when firefighting feels far more urgent?

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00:24:18.500 --> 00:24:22.269

Belinda Wood: I mean, I think that came up again in the poll at the beginning.

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00:24:22.270 --> 00:24:44.510

Belinda Wood: And really, just on that... this third item that I'm speaking about, just to really emphasize the importance of routines, being able to carve out time as a team, to really ensure that you get together, you gather, you're able to assess progress, and you're able to move a particular priority from crisis to one of coordinated structure.

127

00:24:44.670 --> 00:24:59.219

Belinda Wood: So there's a couple of key attributes, to a good routine, but obviously you need to have them, and you need to have them regularly. You obviously don't want to have them too often. People get quite a lot of meeting fatigue, if that is the case.

128

00:24:59.220 --> 00:25:01.109

Pablo Sobrino: But you want to have them often enough.

129

00:25:01.110 --> 00:25:12.120

Belinda Wood: So that you are able to assess progress and answer quite quickly whether you are off track or not. You... and you need to make sure that there's enough accountability in the system as well.

130

00:25:12.430 --> 00:25:16.210

Belinda Wood: So I suggest, just in conclusion in this... in this section, is...

131

00:25:16.220 --> 00:25:26.019

Belinda Wood: Going through these steps, once you've had time to... once you've carved out time to have some... some strategic thinking, the question is, how do you then

132

00:25:26.020 --> 00:25:39.919

Belinda Wood: how do you then do that? I mean, I've really reflected on the importance of prioritization, some of the ways that you can do that, having a good plan, and the importance of having a delivery chain that really underpins that.

133

00:25:39.990 --> 00:25:56.579

Belinda Wood: And then once you have that all sorted, to really focus on the routines, to be able to assess progress, and understand, where you are moving to. With that, handing back to Pablo, who will, speak a little bit about how you manage distractions.

134

00:25:56.690 --> 00:26:05.830

Belinda Wood: and conflicting goals, which again was, Pablo, I thought, a nice, answer to the poll, and very relevant for the audience that's here.

135

00:26:06.760 --> 00:26:17.700

Pablo Sobrino: Thank you, Belinda. So I... so I'm gonna... I was gonna do distractions first, and then priorities, but it just ties back to what Belinda was talking about, which is one of the things I find about priority setting

136

00:26:17.810 --> 00:26:25.279

Pablo Sobrino: is that... We choose... Priorities are essentially dictated to us.

137

00:26:25.400 --> 00:26:39.069

Pablo Sobrino: In many cases. And, you have to actually sort through them. Your boss has delegated these things to you because they can't sort out what's the most important thing, or they have forgotten.

138

00:26:39.070 --> 00:26:52.580

Pablo Sobrino: the last important thing that they gave you. So... so it is... it is up to you to kind of decide what those priorities are. And this is where the strategic goals of the organization, the strategic objectives of your organization, are quite important.

139

00:26:52.630 --> 00:26:58.050

Pablo Sobrino: Because what you need to do is the priorities that you need to work on are the things

140

00:26:58.050 --> 00:27:16.739

Pablo Sobrino: that are tied to moving forward the organization's main objectives. So I can get 100 different tasks, and those are tasks, but not things that are going to get me... move me forward. And one of the little things I did, which is on my desk, and now in the world of virtual offices, you'd have to put it somewhere on your device.

141

00:27:16.770 --> 00:27:26.039

Pablo Sobrino: is I would write down, in fairly bold letters, the strategic objectives that I had set out for the organization.

142

00:27:26.150 --> 00:27:36.939

Pablo Sobrino: And it's always there, front and center, it's always in my face, I can see it. And you have to ask yourself all the time, is what I'm doing now contributing to getting this done?

143

00:27:37.060 --> 00:27:44.020

Pablo Sobrino: And so, that's something you have to question yourself, and that is a way of choosing which things I'm going to work on.

144

00:27:44.020 --> 00:27:59.829

Pablo Sobrino: And I mean, it's simple to say, I know, but nevertheless, it is, an important part of focus. So, as Belinda laid out, kind of how you shape what you have to get done to move your strategic priorities forward.

145

00:28:00.630 --> 00:28:04.729

Pablo Sobrino: Knowing what those priorities are all the time are going to help you

146

00:28:04.890 --> 00:28:09.040

Pablo Sobrino: move that forward. So, what did I do this week that moved this forward? What did I move...

147

00:28:09.090 --> 00:28:27.579

Pablo Sobrino: what did I do today to move this forward? So, anyway, that's kind of the priority setting piece, very briefly. We can talk for hours on priority setting. Now, managing distractions. So, there's something that I have learned over many, many years, having met many multitaskers in the world.

148

00:28:27.580 --> 00:28:40.569

Pablo Sobrino: The brain actually can't multitask. What it can do is switch between things and keep track of things, and run things kind of essentially in parallel. But it can't... the brain works sequentially.

149

00:28:40.570 --> 00:28:56.810

Pablo Sobrino: So, task is completed, it completes a task, it moves on to the next thing. If the next thing is, 3 seconds later, and you can do something else, great, it sounds like you're multitasking, but you're actually going, moving along. And one of the dangers of,

150

00:28:56.890 --> 00:29:01.000

Pablo Sobrino: Of switching what you're thinking about is called context shifting.

151

00:29:01.160 --> 00:29:14.430

Pablo Sobrino: It can... when you're in deep focus, if you have... are distracted by something, it can take you up to 20 minutes to get your brain back into that mode of deep thinking. So, many of you have been...

152

00:29:14.430 --> 00:29:21.700

Pablo Sobrino: And this goes back to school as well. You're writing, and somebody interrupts your writing, and you'll get out of the flow.

153

00:29:21.930 --> 00:29:25.180

Pablo Sobrino: To be in that flow requires this focus.

154

00:29:25.620 --> 00:29:36.480

Pablo Sobrino: So, focus is hard, and the worst things that have happened to... for focus have happened in the last 15 years, and it comes with this device.

155

00:29:36.520 --> 00:29:54.910

Pablo Sobrino: It comes with our computers, our email, Slack, Teams, whatever it is, the instant messaging, that comes along. They are attention-seeking machines, and unfortunately, and this is, I mean, there's lots of evidence now, our brains are being wired.

156

00:29:54.970 --> 00:29:58.880

Pablo Sobrino: The dopamine hit you get from reacting

157

00:29:59.100 --> 00:30:14.600

Pablo Sobrino: makes you lose focus, because you enjoy, actually, the thrill of getting that message, or to be, you know, having to react. So I'm going to ask you all to do something, and I would ask you to do it tonight. So...

158

00:30:14.900 --> 00:30:16.420

Pablo Sobrino: Try and exercise.

159

00:30:16.930 --> 00:30:22.150

Pablo Sobrino: Set us... try and set aside 30 minutes tonight,

160

00:30:22.300 --> 00:30:36.100

Pablo Sobrino: try to read something, and it could be a chapter in a novel, a magazine article, or some kind of long-form article online, whatever. Read it, comprehend it, make some notes about it, understand what it is, and try and

161

00:30:36.100 --> 00:30:53.860

Pablo Sobrino: This is going to be very hard to do in today's world. Like, a lot of people cannot do this. And so the practical piece of advice is training your mind how to get rid of distraction. So that means turning off notifications, turning your phone on airplane mode, those kinds of things.

162

00:30:54.120 --> 00:31:08.139

Pablo Sobrino: And being able to sit down and focus for 30 minutes. I will cha- I will say that most people won't be able to do it. You'll find something to... you know, oh, I gotta change the laundry. Oh, I gotta go load the dishwasher. Oh, I gotta...

163

00:31:08.490 --> 00:31:15.680

Pablo Sobrino: It's hard to do 30 minutes. If you're unsuccessful, get a timer and try doing it for 10 minutes.

164

00:31:15.680 --> 00:31:32.260

Pablo Sobrino: train yourself to do this. It'll take 3 or 4 weeks to get yourself up to 30 minutes, and the most time that you can really spend time in tense focus is about 90 minutes. I mean, there are certain people who can do beyond that, but 90 minutes is a good time to, to have productive, focused thinking, so...

165

00:31:32.290 --> 00:31:52.069

Pablo Sobrino: Why am I saying this? Because strategic thinking is... I mean, it is a bit of a group activity, but at the end of the day, you all want to be managers, you all want to be leaders. You're the ones that actually have to spend some time thinking about how you're going to get advanced stuff, and then how do you bring the teams together and all those things? Those are other elements that you have to do, so...

166

00:31:52.070 --> 00:31:56.580

Pablo Sobrino: So that's why I'm... Like, managing distraction is really simply

167

00:31:56.580 --> 00:32:14.440

Pablo Sobrino: Getting rid of the distractions, and then figuring... learning how to focus, so that one hour that you set aside, that you found in your calendar to do the things Belinda was talking about, that you actually get that done in those, 60 minutes. So that's kind of the piece I had.

168

00:32:14.440 --> 00:32:19.339

Pablo Sobrino: with that, I think I'm gonna wrap it up there from my point of view.

169

00:32:19.560 --> 00:32:34.560

Pablo Sobrino: There's lots more to talk about. I think AI is a dangerous tool, so that's something we can talk if anybody has that in the chat. And really because the ability to think comes from you, it doesn't come from a device.

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00:32:34.560 --> 00:32:34.950

Belinda Wood: Yeah.

171

00:32:34.950 --> 00:32:41.399

Pablo Sobrino: So, well, we can talk about that if anybody has a question about that. So, anyway, there you go. I really think...

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00:32:41.400 --> 00:32:57.110

Pablo Sobrino: You need to learn how to focus, you need to schedule a time to meet with yourself to focus there, and you need to write down what you've thought and keep it accessible so that you don't lose that thought, and it actually focuses your work over the future.

173

00:32:57.160 --> 00:32:59.320

Pablo Sobrino: So, that's it for me. Thank you.

174

00:32:59.940 --> 00:33:02.969

Belinda Wood: Thanks, Pablo, and I think, just to add on to that.

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00:33:02.980 --> 00:33:11.090

Belinda Wood: It's a good idea to write it down, because one gets quite, distracted from a longer-term perspective.

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00:33:11.090 --> 00:33:23.639

Belinda Wood: And so sometimes one forgets what you set yourself to do 6 months ago. And when you look back, you either get confronted with one of two things. Complete amazement that you've got it done, or you're so far, or...

177

00:33:23.710 --> 00:33:42.829

Belinda Wood: completely distracted and were unable to achieve any of that particular goal. So I really like that bit about writing it down. Quite a few of the questions that were submitted by the community before alluded to working, strategic thinking as it relates to one's community that you are in.

178

00:33:42.830 --> 00:33:51.590

Belinda Wood: The team that you're in, the manager that you're engaging with, and quite a few of the questions were along the lines of, how do I work effectively within a team?

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00:33:51.670 --> 00:33:58.490

Belinda Wood: What, what do I put in place to ensure that our team is working collectively on a single, strategy?

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00:33:58.670 --> 00:34:16.389

Belinda Wood: Or priority. And I think just to build on with what Pablo's saying, I mean, we've obviously spent quite a bit of time talking about how one works as an individual, but the reality of a lot of our organizations is that we do work on a priority, or a strategy as a collective.

181

00:34:16.389 --> 00:34:20.790

Belinda Wood: It's your team that's working on it, not just you as an individual.

182

00:34:20.909 --> 00:34:34.409

Belinda Wood: And so just to answer that particular portion, it's something that, I've already alluded to earlier, and something that Pablo's alluded to, is the importance of carving out that time to work together, as a team.

183

00:34:34.540 --> 00:34:47.519

Belinda Wood: And we've called... I might call it routines, it might be called something else, but really carving out that space, to, spend time looking at where you've got to with that particular priority.

184

00:34:47.570 --> 00:34:58.810

Belinda Wood: So, it obviously starts with knowing what your priority is, and being quite clear who needs to do what, and then coming together on occasion to really assess how you've done.

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00:34:59.040 --> 00:35:02.230

Belinda Wood: Depending on the organization that you work for.

186

00:35:02.570 --> 00:35:08.800

Belinda Wood: It's often also quite helpful to have some public-facing, aspect of your work.

187

00:35:09.030 --> 00:35:18.780

Belinda Wood: So if you're working on delivering a service to the public, for example, I used that earlier, but potable water access, or maybe delivering textbooks.

188

00:35:18.780 --> 00:35:24.299

Belinda Wood: It's often helpful to, where possible, be quite transparent with the data.

189

00:35:24.300 --> 00:35:40.780

Belinda Wood: And really, projecting that in a dashboard or on a website to the public, so that they are able to see, how you're doing with that particular rollout. And we found that in quite a few instances to be quite useful to keep minds focused within an institution.

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00:35:40.840 --> 00:35:45.119

Belinda Wood: When there's that sort of external facing, view.

191

00:35:45.480 --> 00:35:53.520

Belinda Wood: So Nigel, with that, that is the input from Pablo and I, and excited, I can see the chat is, yep.

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00:35:53.520 --> 00:35:54.460

Nigel Smith: Very busy in the chat.

193

00:35:54.460 --> 00:35:55.989

Belinda Wood: Yes, yes, thank you.

194

00:35:55.990 --> 00:36:11.110

Nigel Smith: brilliant, insightful discussion, and Pablo, your challenge, I really like it, and I think the thing, I think the extra little thing that you mentioned about taking notes on what you're reading, and sort of encouraging that, that feels like the extra step that I don't.

195

00:36:11.110 --> 00:36:11.580

Belinda Wood: Oh my god.

196

00:36:11.580 --> 00:36:21.789

Nigel Smith: personally would have sort of instinctively done, and, seems really important. So, yeah, I will let you know how I get on with that paper.

197

00:36:23.350 --> 00:36:43.910

Nigel Smith: Do, everybody, please keep sharing any questions you've got for Belinda and Pavlo. Lots of questions already, but do use the Q&A. If you use the Q&A rather than the chats at the bottom of the screen, you can upvote there, and it means we'll definitely see the questions. But,

198

00:36:44.260 --> 00:37:00.549

Nigel Smith: in terms of the upvoting, this is the question that's been upvoted the most, from Tim, and you can both have a crack at this. Do you distinguish between strategic thinking time to solve a specific problem in that time.

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00:37:00.550 --> 00:37:11.760

Nigel Smith: and strategic thinking time to just ponder issues to make progress, but not necessarily come to a resolution or decision? Or are they the same?

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00:37:11.990 --> 00:37:17.990

Nigel Smith: thing. Just maybe put up your hand, who is keenest to answer that first.

201

00:37:19.560 --> 00:37:20.430

Nigel Smith: Neither of them.

202

00:37:22.020 --> 00:37:22.870

Pablo Sobrino: Go ahead, Melinda.

203

00:37:22.870 --> 00:37:24.010

Nigel Smith: Go on, Belinda.

204

00:37:26.020 --> 00:37:33.309

Belinda Wood: Perfect. I think, to not answer the question directly, but to give some observations, I think that

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00:37:33.420 --> 00:37:50.600

Belinda Wood: Pablo's exercise is useful. There is... there is value in training yourself to think strategically. And so that is the exercise that Pablo has, suggested earlier, which is, as an individual, really equipping yourself to be able to think strategically.

206

00:37:50.600 --> 00:37:58.370

Belinda Wood: And every time you do that, it's not to achieve the organization's goals. It's to really equip and train yourself to be able to do that.

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00:37:58.550 --> 00:38:09.399

Belinda Wood: Because when you are given an opportunity to think strategically as a collective, then you have equipped yourself and skilled yourself to be able to do that.

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00:38:09.800 --> 00:38:21.800

Belinda Wood: So I think strategic thinking time is really an opportunity for you as an individual to, hone your skills, to give some thought to the organization and your contribution to it.

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00:38:22.050 --> 00:38:27.339

Belinda Wood: And yeah, so that it's not necessarily a time where you have to take a decision.

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00:38:28.630 --> 00:38:36.840

Pablo Sobrino: And yes, so just to build on that, to me, the strategic thinking is the process of understanding the greater environment.

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00:38:37.210 --> 00:38:43.629

Pablo Sobrino: understanding... The greater environment beyond what your organization does.

212

00:38:43.740 --> 00:38:50.190

Pablo Sobrino: And being able to spend time connecting dots, for lack of a better word.

213

00:38:50.310 --> 00:39:05.169

Pablo Sobrino: As to how that might affect your organization. So that's kind of the... that's the... that is the strategic thinking. Now, I have given a specific problem, potholes, to use Belinda's example, and that... that...

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00:39:05.220 --> 00:39:13.980

Pablo Sobrino: That strategic thing to solve a particular problem. But having given yourself the tools to understand the interconnections of ideas.

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00:39:14.120 --> 00:39:22.219

Pablo Sobrino: You may know something, or have learned something, that may come up with an innovative solution that would help your team

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00:39:22.320 --> 00:39:40.599

Pablo Sobrino: think of different approaches. So strategic thinking involves, as well, the ability to create scenarios, to... to go down paths and... and say, okay, no, that will not work. So you've spent... invested the time thinking in that stuff. And so...

217

00:39:40.710 --> 00:39:55.190

Pablo Sobrino: to me... so, Tim, it is the same thing, but there are different purposes. One is learning how to strategically think, and then having learned that, how do you actually solve a problem that's specific to the issue that you're facing?

218

00:39:55.330 --> 00:40:01.210

Pablo Sobrino: And you have to make time to do both, obviously. One for your organization and one for yourself.

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00:40:01.830 --> 00:40:02.460

Belinda Wood: Hmm.

220

00:40:03.210 --> 00:40:17.889

Nigel Smith: couple of questions that are not necessarily to do with, sort of, like, strategic thinking in terms of the time, but more about, sort of, strategy, and I think, common, experiences for people working in government. So I'm just going to put them both to you and tackle them briefly, but,

221

00:40:18.060 --> 00:40:40.869

Nigel Smith: Do you have any tips for communicating strategy to more senior people who are time and attention poor? And then the flip of that, also around communication, how do you push back when you are tasked by senior management for things that don't align with strategic

priorities of the organization? These feel like very common topics that often come up in these types of discussions among people working in government.

222

00:40:41.750 --> 00:40:43.750

Belinda Wood: Pablo, why don't you take this one first?

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00:40:43.750 --> 00:40:45.320

Pablo Sobrino: Sure.

224

00:40:46.960 --> 00:40:55.050

Pablo Sobrino: So, having been a senior manager that comes up with a new priority that nobody heard of before, I'll... I'll talk a little bit about it.

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00:40:55.350 --> 00:41:00.430

Pablo Sobrino: The best way to brief me as a senior manager is to tell me a story.

226

00:41:00.550 --> 00:41:06.489

Pablo Sobrino: To be able to... to have put together your thought and your...

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00:41:06.680 --> 00:41:23.560

Pablo Sobrino: objectives and your performance measures and all that stuff, is can you tell a story? Can you, can you tell me something that, a story in a simple word, in simple words, that, probably linked to the problem you're trying to solve?

228

00:41:23.560 --> 00:41:29.020

Pablo Sobrino: And... and so then I can remember that story. And stories have...

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00:41:29.090 --> 00:41:35.320

Pablo Sobrino: A bit of emotion, they have a continuous train of thought, they have connected ideas.

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00:41:35.420 --> 00:41:51.949

Pablo Sobrino: putting stories together is very hard, as any writer would tell you, and so it is a question of being able to tell a story. That's how you brief a senior manager who has no time to be briefed. When you brief the Prime Minister.

231

00:41:52.500 --> 00:41:57.629

Pablo Sobrino: The Prime Minister gets briefed on virtually every main issue in government.

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00:41:58.010 --> 00:42:00.390

Pablo Sobrino: It has to be done on a page.

233

00:42:00.500 --> 00:42:13.110

Pablo Sobrino: And so, how do you tell something so that they get the essence of the problem, the story to the solution, those are the things. And that's very difficult to do. So, I'm not saying it's easy, it's that telling a story is...

234

00:42:13.110 --> 00:42:22.599

Pablo Sobrino: One of the key roles you play as a manager is how do you tell what you're doing to your manager. Manager comes up with a new priority, I'm gonna answer that one, too.

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00:42:23.200 --> 00:42:32.290

Pablo Sobrino: That is a new priority. That... remember that, is that even though it's not the organization's priority, even though it might be the favorite thing

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00:42:32.600 --> 00:42:52.189

Pablo Sobrino: the elected official wants to do, it is now a priority. And so then, how do you fill that? How... now, if you've done good strategic thinking, I can tell you that, generally, I can weave that priority into my strategic objectives. So, it is a little bit of that thinking, as well as, how do I

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00:42:52.250 --> 00:43:10.810

Pablo Sobrino: move this. And, many a senior manager spends time thinking, okay, so they really want to do this, which really is not part of our organization's mandate, so how can we give them back something that actually fits our mandate and achieves partially the goal that they're trying to achieve? So those are kind of...

238

00:43:10.810 --> 00:43:24.359

Pablo Sobrino: These conversations have to happen between the... you just don't accept it, you have a conversation about it, and those conversations have to happen between levels. So, anyway, that's very simple to say from a senior.

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00:43:24.360 --> 00:43:25.040

Nigel Smith: perspective.

240

00:43:25.290 --> 00:43:39.220

Pablo Sobrino: But it is... you need to learn how to use your hierarchy to actually get clarification, to shape things, and maybe to understand what that priority is, which you actually don't see how it fits in your organization, but

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00:43:39.510 --> 00:43:41.059

Pablo Sobrino: The seniors do, so...

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00:43:42.450 --> 00:43:49.460

Pablo Sobrino: Belinda's nodding along, so I'm assuming you sort of broadly agree. So actually, I'm just going to ask you another question to you, Belinda, which I think.

243

00:43:49.460 --> 00:44:06.609

Nigel Smith: really fits with your experience and expertise. This is a question from Lily. Sufficient information from many vantage points is crucial for strategic thinking. In a world where there is an avalanche of information, what tips do you have on information sharing effectively?

244

00:44:07.950 --> 00:44:19.019

Belinda Wood: Lily, that's a fantastic question. And maybe just to take this from a couple of vantage points, I think you're right, information is so important, and just to add to what Pablo was saying.

245

00:44:19.080 --> 00:44:38.889

Belinda Wood: I think it's so important to be able to try pull together a one-pager, and so as part of your exercises, that you're doing for strategic thinking, one of the outputs can be, can I pull a one-pager together, as if I was briefing a prime minister, for example? What would I include? How could I clearly articulate what needs to be done?

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00:44:39.210 --> 00:44:53.119

Belinda Wood: But for Lily's question, there's always a lot of information out there, and I think you can get quite swamped with data and information. And so I would first take a step back and say, what are you trying to do?

247

00:44:53.120 --> 00:44:59.570

Belinda Wood: What are you trying to achieve in this particular instance? And then, what are the indicators that we can craft

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00:44:59.750 --> 00:45:15.530

Belinda Wood: that answers... that supports the... that particular priority. And then underneath that, what are the data sources that will be able to support that particular indicator? And then you'll quickly find out that there's, information that doesn't suit that particular instance.

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00:45:15.530 --> 00:45:25.009

Belinda Wood: And it's not... not necessary. It also obviously depends on who you're briefing. There's obviously, when you're briefing very senior people in government, they have

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00:45:25.310 --> 00:45:43.160

Belinda Wood: particular nuances that they want to see, or they want to see, you know, particular data sources used. So, obviously, my answer is a generic, generic answer, but it's really starting... don't start with the data, start with the problem, and then what data is best, to support that.

251

00:45:45.980 --> 00:45:48.330

Nigel Smith: Great. Thank you.

252

00:45:51.450 --> 00:45:57.860

Nigel Smith: I'll just ask the question, which of you is most keen to answer it. Can you think,

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00:45:57.970 --> 00:46:16.180

Nigel Smith: Sorry, can you speak on thinking strategically to close out projects and initiatives? Government is rife with new projects, initiatives, strategies. The challenge, while partly in launching, implementing, and monitoring, often falls short in closing, ending a project initiative. Any thoughts on strategies to close out a project, or do we simply apply

254

00:46:16.180 --> 00:46:26.929

Nigel Smith: the same methodology. You're both grinning, Pablo and Belinda, sort of experience, perhaps, that close to your own experience.

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00:46:26.930 --> 00:46:44.199

Pablo Sobrino: Oh, yeah, well, there's, so, and my colleagues in the Government of Canada are facing this today after the budget yesterday. So there are... there are programs, we'll call them programs, they could be projects, that have to be wound down.

256

00:46:44.770 --> 00:46:59.669

Pablo Sobrino: There are things that are... there are programs that, have run their course, are not serving the need intended, for which a new program may take its place, a new approach, for delivery may take its place.

257

00:47:00.430 --> 00:47:05.359

Pablo Sobrino: And so it comes back... it is the same approach. It comes back to telling a story.

258

00:47:05.530 --> 00:47:14.310

Pablo Sobrino: So, the... what the... what a minister needs to shut down a program is a story that explains

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00:47:14.420 --> 00:47:20.680

Pablo Sobrino: Why this is the right thing to do, and what is it, and how will...

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00:47:20.830 --> 00:47:26.730

Pablo Sobrino: How will the, objective that was being addressed by that program

261

00:47:27.000 --> 00:47:39.550

Pablo Sobrino: will be done in a different way. Now, it might not be completely viable or whatever, but the story that we provide is going to be the one that's going to get them there. And so there is a lot of strategic thinking.

262

00:47:39.550 --> 00:47:53.860

Pablo Sobrino: to winding things down as much as there is to bringing things up. It's always nice to build things, it's much harder to tear them down, and and you really want to have some kind of story to build that... to tear that down in the same way, so...

263

00:47:54.050 --> 00:48:04.159

Pablo Sobrino: It's a generic answer. I have lots of examples of things that I've had to shut down, only to have them reversed at some point in the future, so that is also the thing.

264

00:48:04.760 --> 00:48:16.880

Pablo Sobrino: But the biggest change is service delivery. Like, how we deliver services is, I would say, the biggest change that you actually see. So we've gone, you know, from at the counter to online.

265

00:48:16.970 --> 00:48:29.430

Pablo Sobrino: now they're looking at AI to deliver service, those kinds of things. So that evolution, has changed how we deliver things. And those shutdowns, there's always resistance, because

266

00:48:29.600 --> 00:48:36.209

Pablo Sobrino: we, as humans, resist change, and so managing all that and telling it in a story is the way I would do it.

267

00:48:37.260 --> 00:48:49.810

Belinda Wood: I think, Nigel, if I may, just a tip from senior management and political leaders is they often are, as an institution, government can often be quite risk adverse.

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00:48:49.850 --> 00:49:13.559

Belinda Wood: So not keen to, take on any additional risks. And so I find, in terms of the closing down of a project, it's about also answering the question, how are we managing the potential risks associated with closing that down? And being quite clear and articulating that, I find it's very, very helpful, especially with political leaders who are very nervous about the consequences of that.

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00:49:13.560 --> 00:49:14.690

Nigel Smith: decision.

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00:49:15.060 --> 00:49:16.519

Nigel Smith: I think it's a very...

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00:49:16.520 --> 00:49:39.739

Nigel Smith: interesting thing, even to think about, sort of, training and building up that muscle. I remember some years ago actually going to a con... I was speaking at a conference, it was... it was called Beginnings, Middles, and Ends, and it had case studies of projects at the beginning, middle, and end, and I was talking at the end of a project, and it was kind of revelatory, because people were just like, we never talk about this, which is why we're having the, you know, people asking their questions, so I think EAT, it's also...

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00:49:39.740 --> 00:49:44.129

Nigel Smith: Something to build in, potentially, to how people, what...

273

00:49:44.610 --> 00:49:58.020

Nigel Smith: Okay, another good question around, time management. How do you manage not completing the strategic thinking task within your allocated block of time? So you've managed to sneakily

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00:49:58.020 --> 00:50:06.789

Nigel Smith: Put in the meeting that everybody thinks is a meeting. But thinking can be quite open-ended and dependent on your general mental state.

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00:50:06.840 --> 00:50:08.829

Nigel Smith: Either of you want to tackle that one?

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00:50:10.690 --> 00:50:23.379

Pablo Sobrino: Well, I would say that once you're... if you only have the one hour allocated, that is what you have, and so taking notes is important so that you can pick up your thinking again.

277

00:50:23.510 --> 00:50:30.559

Pablo Sobrino: So, the kind of the approach I've taken is I'm working on... kind of...

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00:50:31.360 --> 00:50:40.880

Pablo Sobrino: where are we going to go next, might be the question I'm working on, and I have a bunch of, kind of, environmental information, I have a bunch of things that we do.

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00:50:40.880 --> 00:50:54.689

Pablo Sobrino: And I kind of accumulate that, and I start to think about, okay, so if we do this, this, this, this, and I start to maybe work out a scenario, and then I'm coming up close to my time, so 5 minutes before, I make sure I make some notes.

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00:50:55.250 --> 00:51:12.960

Pablo Sobrino: back to that and resume the thinking. And this is... this is the same when you're working in a team, as well. Like, you only have so much time to work together as a team before you all have to go back to do other things. And so keeping track of the conversation with yourself or the conversation with your team is essential. So keeping those

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00:51:13.000 --> 00:51:24.580

Pablo Sobrino: accurate kind of notes so that you can resume the thinking, you don't have to redo everything you've already done, which you would normally. But yes, now, if you're on a roll and you can cancel everything.

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00:51:24.850 --> 00:51:32.019

Pablo Sobrino: In the next hour, the hour after, great, do that, but but I know that's not realistic for most people, so...

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00:51:32.780 --> 00:51:33.520

Belinda Wood: Hmm.

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00:51:35.020 --> 00:51:49.850

Nigel Smith: Right. Okay, maybe you take this one, Belinda. Do you have suggestions to coach others, i.e. people in your team, to utilize time effectively for strategic thinking individually? I mean, so much of what we've been talking about is about developing

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00:51:50.220 --> 00:51:54.700

Nigel Smith: kind of best practice, but I think also for a lot of people, kind of new practices and habits.

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00:51:55.920 --> 00:52:08.510

Belinda Wood: Absolutely. I think it starts with... if you... this is obviously coming from a manager of a team, and I think you want to start with, encouraging or shifting the culture within your organization.

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00:52:08.510 --> 00:52:22.680

Belinda Wood: So as a manager, mandating or encouraging everyone to craft out and giving people the okay, that you can set aside some time within your week or your month to do that thinking.

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00:52:22.680 --> 00:52:32.739

Belinda Wood: That's the first thing. The second thing is it always is helpful if you lead from the front, so if you demonstrate what you would like others to do, so making sure that you

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00:52:32.740 --> 00:52:45.429

Belinda Wood: put that time in your diary. But then also knowing that not everyone can just start doing it straight away. People might need coaching, mentorship, and really just encouraging that and allowing that within your organization.

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00:52:46.810 --> 00:52:47.400

Nigel Smith: Great.

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00:52:47.870 --> 00:53:02.909

Nigel Smith: Great. Okay, we've got a few more minutes left. I'm gonna ask this question to you, Pablo, from Grun, because you've been talking about storytelling quite a bit. Could you actually give an example of a story that you've used to brief your manager, or to end a project?

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00:53:05.320 --> 00:53:10.029

Pablo Sobrino: Sure, so to end the project, so I had to,

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00:53:11.120 --> 00:53:14.749

Pablo Sobrino: So, many years ago, this is... this is the safety of many...

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00:53:14.750 --> 00:53:16.030

Nigel Smith: That's what I was gonna say, don't want to...

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00:53:16.030 --> 00:53:19.799

Pablo Sobrino: Many years ago, I was, tasked with a,

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00:53:20.110 --> 00:53:23.559

Pablo Sobrino: With the, job of,

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00:53:24.130 --> 00:53:30.240

Pablo Sobrino: shutting down manned, light stations. So those are light stations with light keepers on them.

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00:53:30.580 --> 00:53:37.169

Pablo Sobrino: It's never been successful, and it wasn't successful in this case. But I had to come up with

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00:53:37.700 --> 00:53:48.800

Pablo Sobrino: the story that was gonna... that... for the government to be able to shut them down, and so that's all... involves data. It involves trying to deal with,

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00:53:49.000 --> 00:54:02.130

Pablo Sobrino: with, stories that, anecdotally, favored or supported having manned light stations. And, we spent quite a bit of time

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00:54:02.420 --> 00:54:19.180

Pablo Sobrino: doing that. It was... it was very rough. We had lots of public consultations, lots of acrimony, all that stuff. We got to the end, and in the... in the 12 hours before the decision had to be taken, because there was a whole bunch of finance issues that went with this.

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00:54:19.550 --> 00:54:22.009

Pablo Sobrino: The minis... the decision was reversed.

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00:54:23.170 --> 00:54:26.789

Pablo Sobrino: And so, I had to build a new story.

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00:54:27.240 --> 00:54:39.589

Pablo Sobrino: Essentially, in a period of 36 hours that rationalized why we weren't doing the project of de-staffing the light stations. Which was made with great fanfare and all that kind of stuff.

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00:54:39.660 --> 00:54:51.950

Pablo Sobrino: But it put a big hole in our budget, because it's much more expensive to run staff light stations. So, and we weren't getting the money back, so the money was going to have to come out of other places. So, that... that story...

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00:54:52.070 --> 00:54:59.099

Pablo Sobrino: So I saw how that story get framed? That story got framed by, what was the objective?

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00:55:00.010 --> 00:55:14.019

Pablo Sobrino: What were the benefits of doing this, and what were the potential impacts of doing this? And I think impacts is, I think, is to Belinda's point, the risks. Like, there's always risk with shutting something down or starting something up, so...

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00:55:14.020 --> 00:55:20.370

Pablo Sobrino: And so that's kind of how I pull that story together. But it is a lot of knowledge.

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00:55:20.510 --> 00:55:31.379

Pablo Sobrino: And understanding the context quite clearly, and then having that, to change the story around for that. And interestingly enough, almost half my project team

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00:55:31.460 --> 00:55:46.820

Pablo Sobrino: could not accept this, and so they ended up going to find new work and stuff, because they had been so into doing the job that when the job was completely reversed, they couldn't do it, so they went off to find other things to do. So, anyway, interesting.

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00:55:47.030 --> 00:56:00.099

Nigel Smith: Yeah, very, very interesting, and very, very challenging, as well. We're getting to the close, I'm afraid. Plenty of questions I'm afraid we've not had time to answer. Quickly, just to blend in, I'm not sure if it's really something maybe to share later, but some... Mark asked just...

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00:56:00.230 --> 00:56:07.419

Nigel Smith: Could you... is it possible to get a copy of an exemplary delivery chain plan? Just keen to see your approach,

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00:56:07.420 --> 00:56:25.249

Nigel Smith: And do you have an... Sheetra asked, do you have an example of strategic objectives? Are these a mission statement, of an organization? So maybe very briefly touch on that, and perhaps explain how we can... we can share... we can share stuff afterwards with the... with the group, and then, I'm afraid we're going to have to start, wrapping up.

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00:56:25.700 --> 00:56:34.769

Belinda Wood: Perfect. Well, the answer is yes and yes. So, you mentioned the resources tab earlier, I'm sure, it will be on the portal, the apolitical website.

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00:56:34.970 --> 00:56:42.250

Nigel Smith: I'm absolutely happy to share an example of a delivery chain. I'll share a couple, with sort of annotated notes.

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00:56:42.250 --> 00:56:52.079

Belinda Wood: And as well as, you know, what... we've got quite a nice piece on what is a strategic objective, indicators, etc. And so happy to share that as well.

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00:56:52.240 --> 00:56:54.139

Nigel Smith: Great, thank you.

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00:56:54.210 --> 00:57:06.899

Nigel Smith: Also, I mean, that's great stuff that we'll be posting in... we'll post in the community, that I mentioned, earlier. We've also got a great follow-up resource on today's topic, that we think you'll find useful. It's an article

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00:57:06.900 --> 00:57:30.630

Nigel Smith: called How to Think Strategically About Your Goals. It's written by one of our apolitical contributors. So if you'd like to receive that, if you go to the Life in Government community after the event, leave a comment. I've written a post there, which is pinned at the top of the page. We'll send you that resource later in the week by email, and my colleagues posted a link to the community in the chat.

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00:57:30.920 --> 00:57:55.610

Nigel Smith: as well. So, such a rich, discussion. I'm really sorry that we have not had time to answer all of your questions. It's been, tremendous questions and fantastic, insight and wisdom from each of our speakers. I'd really like to ask you all in, joining me in giving, Pablo and Belinda a virtual round of applause. I'm on... off... I can give them a real round of

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00:57:55.610 --> 00:58:19.159

Nigel Smith: applause, but imagine that multiplied by hundreds. Most importantly, thanks to you, all of you, attending, investing your time, talked about time management, as I said at the beginning. Really appreciate taking... you taking the time out of your busy schedules, to learn together today. The team is just going to pull up a quick poll, just to find out how you felt about today. That really helps us improve how we deliver.

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00:58:19.160 --> 00:58:30.669

Nigel Smith: these events, so we really appreciate your responses. So, just on a scale of 1 to 10, rank your agreement with this statement. The event was a valuable use of my time. 1 meaning you completely disagree, 10 meaning

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00:58:30.670 --> 00:58:35.779

Nigel Smith: that you completely agree. And before we go, while you're responding to the poll.

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00:58:36.030 --> 00:58:58.420

Nigel Smith: Just a few more events coming up that you can register. If you're not available to join live, remember, you can always register for the event, and you'll get the recording sent to you. So, things that we've got coming up, how to get what you need from senior leaders coming up next week with some exciting speakers, including Gatram Raghavan, former assistant to the President and Director of Presidential Personnel in the White House.

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00:58:58.420 --> 00:59:21.079

Nigel Smith: Hacks for working with Word documents, that's in two weeks, where you'll learn time-saving tricks for formatting and collaboration, so you can spend less time fiddling and more time focusing on the work that matters, very pertinent to what we've been talking about just now. And next month, how to build foresight into everyday decisions, where we'll explore how to bring future thinking into your daily work, helping you prepare for what's, ahead.

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00:59:21.530 --> 00:59:45.910

Nigel Smith: So, I'm afraid that is all we've got time for today. Hope you found it helpful. Want to say a huge thank you to our speakers, to everyone who's made today happen, and for you taking time out of your busy days. Keep an eye out on the email coming your way, that'll have the resources and the recording. Do join the community, continue the conversation there, and look forward to seeing you at another apolitical event very soon.

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00:59:45.910 --> 00:59:48.620

Nigel Smith: Have a lovely day, and goodbye!

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