



# Leaders as facilitators

**From 6.00pm on Tuesday, April 24th  
until 3.30pm on Wednesday, April 25th 2018**

**Background Note and Agenda  
for our 17th Leadership Conversation**

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Society of Leadership Fellows, St George's House, Windsor Castle

## This Conversation is for

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**Leaders** who are already good at chairing meetings – and would like to spend some time exploring how you lead meetings so that you become better still at drawing others out and ensuring that you give quality time to the really tricky agenda items that are crucial to the future of your organisation



**Leaders** who perhaps under-estimate your ability to chair a meeting in a way that is more facilitative of others taking part. Our experience is that there are a lot of CEOs and Directors who could be much better in leading meetings and for some reason have talked themselves out of developing a more facilitative style. We hope that by creating the space in which you can explore with peers how you lead meetings, you will quickly acquire a range of practical ideas and additional skills that enable you to achieve a significant improvement in your performance as a facilitator.

**If you join us on April 24/25, we will support you in:**

- Developing your distinctive style of leading meetings as a facilitator, so that you can play to your strengths by being very open with your team and partners about the sort of leader that you are.

A successful facilitation involves those taking part feeling able to relax and say what is right – and they will only be able to do this if YOU feel able to relax and say what YOU believe to be right.

## Partly a facilitation, and partly a Masterclass in facilitation

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This Conversation follows on from one on the same theme early in 2017, and written up as Chapter 7 of *Nurturing Wisdom, Volume One*. You can find this on our Leadership Insights page and a direct link to *Nurturing Wisdom* is [here](#).

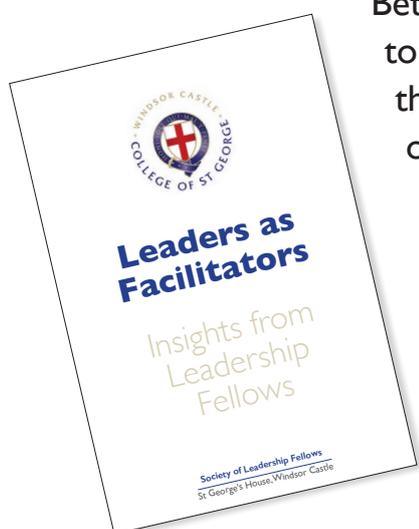
Like all of our Leadership Conversations, this one will be facilitated by two members of our small team of Society facilitators: in this case, Krysia Hudek and Pete Ashby.

Krysia led the previous Conversation on this theme in January 2017. The feedback from the Leadership Fellows who joined that session was exceptionally positive, and it was their request that we hold this follow-up.

Krysia and Pete have both facilitated all sorts of events on their own in the Vicars' Hall – and elsewhere – over the years, as well as co-facilitating a number of the Society's Leadership Conversations in recent months.

Between them they have a host of tips and stories to feed in to our discussions as we tackle the key leadership challenges that need to be engaged with if you are to develop your own distinctive style of leading as a facilitator.

Please try to make sure that you scan Chapter Seven of *Nurturing Wisdom* before arriving in Windsor. A wide range of Fellows have described it as one of the strongest Chapters in Volume I – and we need everyone to read it if we are to move on and cover new ground in this follow-up Conversation.



## Four essential elements of a successful facilitation

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Through this Conversation we will share with you what we regard as the essential elements of a successful facilitation. We will of course invite your challenge, on the basis that our main concern is to support each of you in thinking through the sort of facilitator that you want to be.

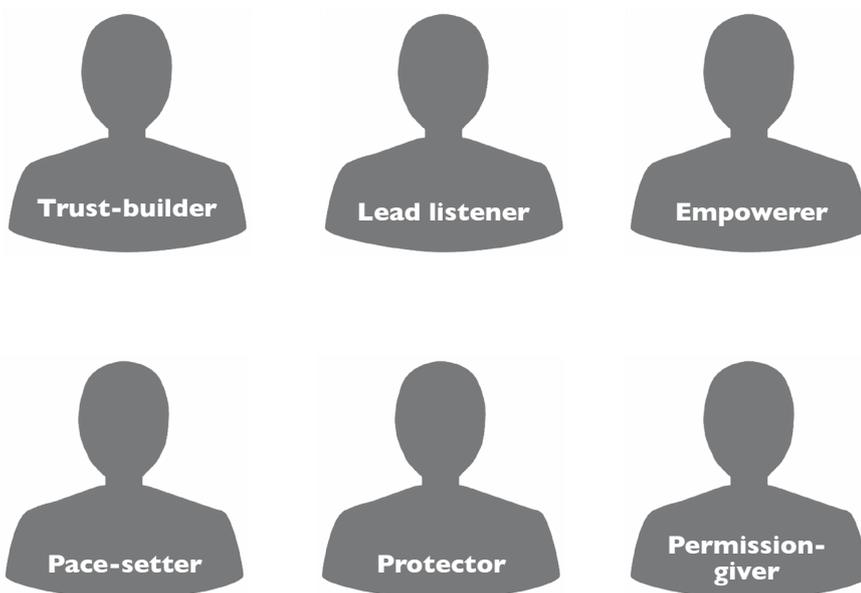
We see four essential elements to any successful facilitation:

- 1** Good preparation beforehand, so that as you go into the session you are clear in your mind about which issues need to be given the lion's share of the time and what sorts of outcomes you are looking for
- 2** Familiarity on your part with the group, so that at some level you have thought about every individual joining the group and the needs and expectations that they are bringing
- 3** A sense of keen curiosity on your part, that drives you to find out as much as you can about what members of the group are thinking and why, and to let yourself be influenced by what they say in a way that is visible to the group. If members of a group feel that the person facilitating the meeting has already made up their mind about what they want from it, and is not open to being influenced by those involved, they will be cynical about the exercise from the outset
- 4** A commitment to winning and retaining the trust of the group. As facilitator you are the steward of the discussion and the group need to trust that there is some sense of "higher purpose" that guides the way you are with them and how you are expecting them to be with everyone else. Unless you first achieve a high level of trust with the group, everything else that you might do to hone your skills as a facilitator is for the birds.

## The challenges of being an effective facilitator

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When you read Chapter 7 of Nurturing Wisdom, you will see that we identified six different roles that you need to play as a facilitator:



During that Conversation, we concentrated mainly on your role as trust-builder. At the end, we agreed that at this one we should turn our attention to your roles as pace-setter and permission-giver.

We picked them out because they are genuinely hard to get right - and if you get them right, they will transform what you can achieve with a group.



## As pace-setter

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● You have to be ahead of the game. Your preparation beforehand is key. Once the session is underway, you have to “hit the ground running” and keep the energy flowing.

*You are driving the discussion and making sure that no-one slows you down too much or creates a diversion. This means that:*

● You have to keep the group focussed at all times. If someone wanders off from the topic, you bring the discussion back on track. If you have limited time before an item is about to end, you remind the group that they have so many minutes to go and you want to be moving towards a decision, even if it is a provisional decision - or indeed two possible options - that you will bring back to a future meeting.

*After a tricky discussion, you need some sort of outcome and as pace-setter you need to drive your team to get as far as they can. If they try to let themselves off the hook by saying it's “too difficult”, you haven't done your job as the pace-setting facilitator*

● In some situations, you might need to adjust the timings of different agenda items as you go. As a general rule, however, the pace-setter needs to keep the discussion to time. If you let one item overrun, you will find it more difficult to keep control of discussion on future items – and the team will lose confidence in you as Chair.

*Pace and control over timings go together; let the timings slip, and you lose a lot of your control – and rather a lot of their confidence in you, too. It's a heavy price to pay for careless facilitation!*



## As permission-giver

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● You set the tone for the discussions from the very beginning. You need to make a point of saying up-front that you want people to feel free to say what is right and to be able to change their mind if and when they are influenced by what others say.

*Unless you give people permission to respond in the moment to the views of others, some will fear appearing too easily influenced, and fickle, if they let themselves go with the flow*

● You also need to encourage members of the group to take risks with the ideas that they raise. Here again, unless you say something positive about the need for risk-taking some will go to great lengths to avoid this lest you criticise their idea for being risky to a point of being reckless.

*This is why, if someone does take a risk, you need to make a point of thanking them for what they have said, whatever you might think of the idea they've come up with!*

● When you are encouraging cross-group challenge, you need to make a point of saying that if anyone disagrees with anything that you say, you want them to feel free to challenge you.

*Unless people are given permission by their boss – and perhaps their boss's boss! – to challenge them, they will immediately fear that if they challenge you it could be tantamount to career suicide!*

● Peer-to-peer challenge is a huge step forward and helps to create the right atmosphere in which it is possible for others to tackle you, as well.

*No one should be exempt from challenge, and part of your role as facilitator is to create the right atmosphere in which everyone – including you - can be challenged!*

## As facilitators, we need to “live” these principles

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**Giving people permission to challenge others, to change their mind, to take risks and generally say what is right rather than what is expected of them is part of a process that needs to be ongoing.**

It isn't something you just have to say once and can then forget about!

You will need to find different ways of saying it again and again, and reinforcing it, and then living it through your own behaviours. Living it requires you as facilitators to be prepared to say if and when your thinking is moving on.

It definitely requires you to acknowledge and thank others who say that their thinking is moving on in response to the inputs of others.

And it definitely requires you to thank someone who challenges you - and think carefully about the reasons that you give to the group if you feel that their challenge is misguided.

They need to be reassured that you are open to the possibility that you might be wrong.

In these moments, it's worth telling yourself that if you let yourself show irritation with anyone who challenges you, you will have blown out of the water in one fell swoop much of the good that you will have done by encouraging cross-group challenge. If people sit there thinking “yet again, we have a leader who asks us to live by one rule whilst they live by another” you will find your influence with the group massively diminished.

Between them, Pete and Krysia have a huge amount of experience of facilitation and they are both very keen to share with you some of the insights that it has taken them quite some years to acquire.

At the same time, they are first and foremost facilitators and so their role will be to support you in sharing ideas with each other and developing your own roles as facilitators.

# Agenda

## Tuesday April 24, 2018

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2.30pm	You are welcome to check into your room in St George's House
4.30pm	Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
5.05pm	Evensong ( <i>optional</i> ):
6.00pm Vicars' Hall	Refreshments, then start of the Conversation. After agreeing our groundrules, we agree the question for our first round of groups. "What are the two main challenges that concern you as a facilitator, and how do you think you might need to change your style to meet them?"
7.30pm	After feedback and debate, we agree on one or two key issues to explore together over dinner
7.45pm	Free time/drinks until dinner is served promptly at 8.30pm
10.00pm	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel ( <i>optional</i> )

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## Wednesday April 25, 2018

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7.45am	Breakfast is served in St George's House
8.45am Vicars' Hall	We hear any overnight reflections, and then turn to our first focus on your role as a pace-setting facilitator. We agree the key elements of this role and then break into our first round of small groups this morning. Back from groups, we share insights, swap tips and techniques and then go through a similar process for our second theme on the facilitator's role as permission-giver. At 12.15 we draw out the main themes of the morning and split into new coaching groups to work together over lunch.
12.30pm	A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall. In groups, we tackle our assigned tasks, and at the end nominate one member of each group to capture one or two insights for the wider group and someone else to capture one or two key challenges that need further discussion
1.15pm	We share insights and challenges, being careful all the time to sharpen up potential "take aways" to support you in developing as facilitators
2.20pm	Opportunity to grab a fresh drink and bring it back to a new chair
2.30pm	We continue the process of sharpening up outcomes, creating the space for supportive challenge and feedback across the group so that we can all gain as many insights as possible from each other as we determine our personal strategies for becoming more effective as facilitators

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**We close the Conversation on the dot of 3.30pm.**