



Stepping forward as leaders of culture change

from 6.00pm on Thursday, April 25th 2019
until 3.30pm on Friday, April 26th

Background Note and Agenda for our 31st Leadership Conversation

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

The secret of change

*is to focus all
of your energy,
not on fighting
the old but on
building the
new.*

Socrates

Personal to us as leaders

Our third Conversation on changing culture

This Conversation follows on from two previous ones on culture change:

- One in 2017, written up as [Chapter Four of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume One](#), in which we explored the key characteristics of a healthy culture
- And the second one in early 2018, captured in [Chapter Three of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume Two](#), in which we set out eleven steps to support Fellows in changing the culture of your organisation for the better.

Connecting better

Whilst both Chapters help to set the context for this Conversation, it is the second one in particular that we want to build on in April.

The message we all took away from that Conversation was that leading culture change is in so many ways **personal** to us as leaders.

Above else, we need to make sure that our people can connect better with us.

Stepping forward more confidently

This is why at this Conversation we will ask which aspects of our **personal leadership style** we each need to work on to achieve a stronger connection.

Throughout the Conversation we will support each other in developing our ways of leading, so that by the time we leave Windsor we all feel that we can step forward more confidently as leaders of culture change.

Eleven steps to change culture for the better

As you will see if you have a chance to skim the insights in [Chapter 3 of Volume 2 of Nurturing Wisdom](#), Leadership Fellows involved in our 2018 Conversation on culture change came up with eleven steps to help change culture for the better:

- 1** The bedrock: We need to offer passion and vision
- 2** The reality check: Passion and vision are not enough
- 3** We need to hold the space for constructive conversation
- 4** We need to challenge the contradictions and tensions within our current culture
- 5** We need to engage with the cynics and would-be saboteurs
- 6** Culture change involves disruption - and that means us occasionally acting as disruptors
- 7** We need to invest more time in our roles coaching, supporting, cajoling and stretching – and that means less doing on our part
- 8** Workarounds are so often our way of avoiding culture change; instead, we need to challenge poor practice more
- 9** We should stop using terms such as “strategy” and “resilience” that have lost their meaning through over-use and misuse
- 10** We should look more closely at how we can reward behaviours that help to foster the culture that we are seeking for our organisations
- 11** To be successful in leading culture change, we need to envisage the culture thriving without us.

Part I **Building Trust**

TRUST

In the first part of a Leadership Conversation, we are always conscious of the importance of building trust among ourselves as a group. It is key to all that we can achieve later on.

Understanding more about the experiences and expectations that we each bring

Once we have agreed the Guiding Principles for this Conversation (set out separately on our [Guiding Principles page](#)) we break into small (standing) groups for 15 minutes.

In this first round we start the process of understanding more about the experiences that we each bring to this Conversation in relation to the process of leading culture change, as well as our expectations in relation what we want to achieve.

Questions for our first round of small groups

Our current thinking is that we should ask you to engage with the following questions during our first round of groups:

Looking at the eleven propositions that our previous Conversation on this theme identified for helping to change culture for the better,

- ❓ **Among the ones that you AGREE WITH, which one are you drawn to the most – and WHY?**
- ❓ **Is there another one in the list that you would LIKE to act on but regard as particularly tough? If so, what makes it SO TOUGH?**

TRUST
TRUST
CONNECT
CONNECT
STRETCH
STRETCH

Part I Building Trust

continued

TRUST

PLEASE be completely honest

One of the reasons we are so keen for us all to embrace a high trust model from the outset is because we want to ask that we are completely honest with each other, right from the beginning.

Those of you who have been involved in previous Leadership Conversations know that we always say at the outset that we are coming together to deal with our own “stuff” as leaders. We work hard at resisting the temptation to talk about the leadership styles of others not in the room, and why they’re not much good at driving culture change!

It is so easy to become commentators telling each other what everyone else is doing wrong without confronting what **we ourselves** need to do to become more effective leaders.

Finding out what we are each up against as leaders

When you rejoin the main circle we hope there will be time for most of you to share your personal answers to these questions.

We want to find out how much we generally regard culture change as an area where we are succeeding, and want to make greater headway on the basis that we are moving forward.

If, in fact, a good number of us feel that culture change is so tough that we really haven’t had much impact so far, and we’re almost “running to stand still”, then we want to draw this out in an open and relaxed way.

The very best Leadership Conversations are those where we are each **really open** from the outset about what we think we’re up against.

TRUST
CONNECT
CONNECT
STRETCH
STRETCH

Part 2 **ACHIEVING STRONGER CONNECTIONS**

CONNECT
CONNECT
CONNECT
CONNECT
CONNECT

One of the great benefits of an overnight Conversation is that by the time we are back together in the Vicars' Hall at 8.45 on the Friday morning, we should feel conscious of how much trust we have built among ourselves as a group.

This makes it possible for us to connect so much more powerfully with each other's stories, as well as taking away more shared learning.

We will fine-tune the questions for groups in light of our discussions over dinner the previous evening and of course the flow of the Conversation this morning.

Engaging with specific challenges in greater depth

We expect that at least four of the propositions from our previous Conversation merit more in-depth discussion in small groups:

- 1** Creating the space for **constructive conversation**
- 2** Engaging with the **cynics and would-be saboteurs**
- 3** **Rewarding the behaviours** that help to foster the culture we are seeking for our organisation
- 4** **Developing our own role as disruptive leaders** (drawing also on the insights arising from our February 25-26 Conversation on Disruptive Leadership).

There are a few disruptive leaders who would be quick to challenge Socrates' proposition that they should only "build the new" and **not** "fight the old". They would argue that some of the most effective disruption can take place in "fighting the old". What do you think?

TRUST
TRUST
CONNECT
CONNECT
STRETCH
STRETCH

Part 2**ACHIEVING STRONGER CONNECTIONS***continued***Gearing in to the most powerful Part of this Conversation**

By moving in and out of small groups during the morning we hope to “drill down” into some of those most important – and most difficult – issues that we each need to engage with if we are to develop our roles as leaders of culture change.

We then want to use our discussions over lunch to move into the third Part of the Conversation, when we support each other in “going for the stretch”.

This is only possible once we have built really high levels of trust and connection across the group.

Braver in our thinking

Everything up to now has been about enabling us to become that much braver in our thinking when we reach this stage, so that we are all prepared to take risks in trying out ideas on each other in ways that most of us would never dream of doing in a traditional “conference”.

Please rest assured that if you try an idea out on us and subsequently feel that you went a little “over the top”, it will be easy to tone it down and make it that much safer.

It’s more creative working this way than trying to “risk up” an idea that started off as a safe proposition!

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

**Our
ambitions
are bold**

*and so must be our desire to
change and evolve our culture.*

Satya Nadella, Chief Executive of Microsoft

Part 3 GOING FOR THE STRETCH

STRETCHING OURSELVES

The reason we start with a quote from Satya Nadella is because we want to take it as given that those among us who are most ambitious for what our organisation might achieve should be most open to challenging ourselves as to how we can become more effective leaders of culture change.

The bolder our ambitions, the greater the need for us to be open to seeking radical changes in the culture of our organisation to enable it to achieve those ambitions.

Our question to consider over lunch

A few minutes before we break for lunch in the Vicars' Hall, we will agree on the question that we want to consider in small working groups over lunch.

Our thinking at present is that it should be:

- **What are the two or three aspects of our personal leadership style that we each need to work on the most to achieve a stronger connection with others as a leader of culture change within our organisation?**

This is when we want to be able to take for granted a high degree of vulnerability on each of our parts, as we share our personal thinking with others in our group and let our thinking be influenced by our morning discussions.

This brings to mind a phrase used by Brené Brown at *TED2012*:

- *“Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change”.*

On this basis, we hope we will have some very creative conversations over lunch!

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

Aiming for breakthroughs in our thinking

After lunch we join the circle again, at 1.15pm. As we share the ideas that we have each come up with, we hope that we will be ready to respond to other Fellows by engaging with their insights and encouraging them as they move on in their thinking.

This is the stage in previous Conversations when some Fellows have achieved real breakthroughs in how they view themselves as leaders as a result of others diving in with ideas and advice.

Three stretching resolves

In our final round of small groups at 2.10pm we will break you into groups of two or three to support each other in coming up with three stretching resolves to bring back to the final session and share with the rest of us.

It is remarkable how much we can all gain from this final hour together, not least because our “no recycling” ground rule means that it’s not an option for anyone to repeat anything that they have already shared with the group!

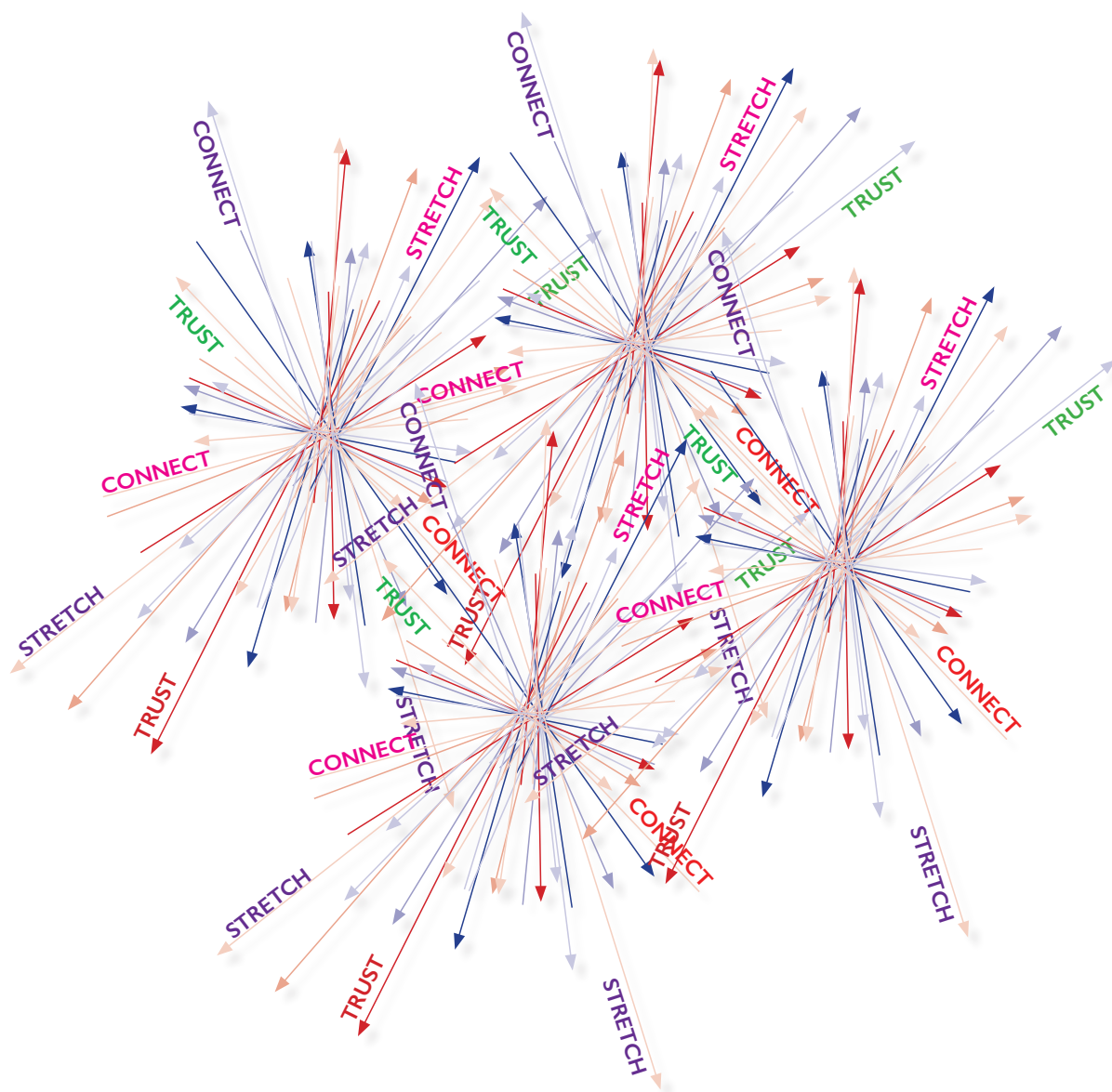
Challenging our own longstanding assumptions

One of the insights that we often share with each other after a Leadership Conversation is that at so many conferences people **stop pushing themselves** in their thinking long before the end.

We position ourselves at the other end of this spectrum! We work on the basis that the more progress we make during a Conversation, the harder we should push and challenge ourselves right through to the final few minutes.

As you will see, this is why some of the best insights come in literally the closing minutes of a Conversation. They draw on the **powerful energy** that we have created among ourselves as a group by then.

It is this that makes so much possible in terms of challenging some of our own longstanding assumptions about how we should and shouldn’t behave as leaders.



Video link-up: Thursday 18th July 2019

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will also arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up in July to swap notes. This will give us all a chance to hear how much progress we have all made in taking forward our resolves.

For previous video link-ups we have found that we can cover a tremendous amount of ground in one hour.

Usually Fellows share a very brief email beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which ones you found the most challenging – and we take it from there!

Suggested time for Video Link-up: 10.00 to 11.00am on 18 July 2019

Agenda

Thursday, April 25th 2019

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 (optional)
5.55pm <i>in the Vicars' Hall</i>	Refreshments, then start of the Conversation. After agreeing our guiding principles, we break into small groups to consider our opening question (p 5)
7.30pm	After feedback and debate, we agree on key issues to explore over dinner
7.40pm	Free time/drinks until dinner is served promptly at 8.15pm
9.45pm	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel (optional)

Friday, April 26th

7.45am	Breakfast is served in St George's House
8.45am <i>in the Vicars' Hall</i>	We hear any overnight reflections before we connect more deeply with some of the issues that have been raised. We then agree on the key question for our next round of small groups (four possible options on page 7). Back in the circle we hear what insights you take from your small group discussions and build up from there, being careful to concentrate on those key issues that are most important to your personal strategies for becoming more effective as leaders of culture change
12.15pm	We prepare for our lunchtime groups, when we want to stretch ourselves that much more as we ask what are the two or three aspects of our personal leadership style that we most need to work on to achieve a stronger connection with others as a leader of culture change (page 10)
12.30pm	A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups
1.15pm	We hear feedback from our lunchtime discussions and seek to stretch ourselves in drawing out any challenges that we feel we are not confronting head-on. We aim to sharpen up any personal choices that we need to make if we are each to maximise our impact as leaders of culture change
2.10pm	Last round of small groups in which you sharpen up your top three personal resolves to share with us in the "final lap". Tea, coffee and cake available
2.25pm	In this final session, we ask you to adopt a ground rule of 'no recycling', under which we all agree not to repeat views that we have already shared in the Vicars' Hall. As we share our resolves there is time for positive challenge across the group before we draw together our key outcomes and conclude this Leadership Conversation on the dot of 3.30pm

*“The person who says it
cannot be done
should not interrupt
the person doing it”*

Old Chinese saying



*Key background
reference for this
Conversation*

Nurturing Wisdom
Volume 2, Chapter 3,
Leading Culture Change