



Facilitating strategic ideas-building



**6.00pm Thursday, April 30 until
3.30pm Friday, May 1 2020**

Background Note and Agenda for our 49th Leadership Conversation

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

This Leadership Conversation builds on our Leaders as facilitators theme

*A link to the report is on the final page of this Background Paper.
We will follow on from the ideas set out in the report and especially the words below from Chapter Two:*




What would success look like?

The phrase that we came up with was about helping a group to "live possible futures".

To some, this might not sound such a big deal.

To those of us who delight in the challenge of facilitation, we know that achieving this is quite something!



8 benefits and hoped for take-aways

- 1 A clearer idea of what you would like **your distinctive style** as a facilitator to be
- 2 Some **practical tips** for how best to transform your current style into the one that would most effectively play to your strengths
- 3 **Sharing of ideas** about how other Fellows intend to develop their techniques as facilitative leaders (the resolves that people take forward after Windsor often draw on two or three different ideas from the Conversation)
- 4 A chance to **name some of the fears** that can terrorise us all as facilitators (such as how to handle hijackers and snipers!) and **build our courage** for managing some of the most difficult moments
- 5 **Ideas about how to manage expectations**, so that groups are not rushed into decisions they're not ready for. You might, for example, create a two-part session where people have the space to reflect on options before taking firm decisions
- 6 A range of **groundrules and guiding principles** to help set the scene at the beginning of an ideas-building session
- 7 Supportive follow-up through the **special WhatsApp group** that we will set up at the end of the Conversation
- 8 **Sharing of progress** in implementing resolves at our online follow-up at **3.00pm on July 21st**. We love the fact that nearly 3 months after a Conversation we're still there for each other as Leadership Fellows. We're always struck by the power of the sharing about which resolves have worked out really well - and not so well!

***The more you put in
the more you take away!***



Our mission from 6.00pm on April 30th:



To support each other in developing our roles as facilitative leaders, able to draw out the creative energies of colleagues and partners in ways that they find empowering and stretching.

We will ask:

- What do we each regard as our **greatest challenge** in facilitating strategic ideas-building conversations and how might we best support each other in tackling it?
- What would we each like to regard as our **distinctive style** as facilitators and how should we change our current style to achieve this?
- How should we handle those **most difficult moments** that can face us all as facilitators, such as someone trying to hijack the agenda for the session or two people getting into a serious spat that alienates others in the group?

During the final session we will each identify two or three stretching resolves over the coming weeks to enable us to step forward more confidently as facilitative leaders, with a growing capacity to inspire others through our personal leadership of strategic ideas-building.

"This is me!"

"Tell us more"

"Yes I can!"



The three stages to our Conversation

We will structure our discussions around three stages:

1 "This is me!"

We put stage one under this heading because early on we want to encourage you to **share a story** that helps us understand better where you are coming from as a leader.

To help us achieve strong connections across our group, please be up for sharing something about yourself in a way that helps others gain some sense of the sort of leader that you are.

2 "Tell us more"

Stage two is under this heading because we hope that by now we will all want to mobilise the power of questioning to draw each other out.

We want to **get behind each other's stories** as we think through how best to support each other in developing our **distinctive styles** as facilitative leaders.

3 "Yes I can!"

Our third and final stage is about each of us **stepping into a really empowered place** where we have a greater sense of all that we can achieve through new ways of leading strategic discussions.

For every breakthrough in thinking during this third stage, we will be able to identify its origins in the stories that we have each shared and the curiosity that others have shown in response.

"This is me!"

From 6.00pm on Thursday through to 10.00am on Friday

After agreeing our Guiding Principles for this Conversation, we will explore our first question in small groups.

Our thinking at the moment is that in small groups we should ask you to share with each other:

- **Which aspect of your facilitation style** would you most like to work on, through this Conversation, to become more effective in facilitating strategic ideas-building?
- If you were to achieve exactly what you want here, which **two or three words** would you like others to use - that they probably wouldn't use at the moment - to describe you as a facilitative leader?

Through your answers we should be able to focus our discussions and prioritise the key issues that we engage with in ways that match what **you** most want to take away from this Conversation.

"I know I need to be more open-minded about where the discussion might end up - I'm just worried others will think I don't know what I want!"

"One or two members of the team can become really pushy and whenever they go like this I just feel myself backing off!"



"Tell us more"

From around 10.00am on Friday through to 12.30pm

By around 10.00am on Friday we should have sharpened up the key challenges that are of greatest concern to us as a group.

We then want to work through them, starting with the most difficult (of course!) and moving in and out of small groups to sharpen up our thinking and come up with fresh ideas that draw on our personal experiences and stories as leaders.

Linking style to the "permissions" in the room


As we are exploring our styles as facilitative leaders, we want to make a point of linking them to the sorts of **conventions and permissions** that we agree at the beginning of an ideas-building session.

For example, in the left-hand speech bubble at the bottom of the previous page we highlight the way in which some leaders programme themselves to have to know what they want to come out of a discussion before it gets underway! This habit can so easily get in the way of members of their team talking freely because they feel that their CEO/ team leader is working towards some **pre-determined outcomes**.

This is one of the reasons why in the Society we have our guiding principle about us all using Leadership Conversations to challenge our own assumptions - and being prepared to do so **before** challenging the assumptions of others.

So we will want to draw out how much you expect to encourage those taking part to **challenge themselves** before challenging others as well as taking risks with ideas.

If we want others to **give themselves permission** to take risks in thinking about new ideas, and also take on board the **principle of self-challenge**, we need to be explicit in saying so at the outset of a session - as well as being thoughtful about how we model this ourselves.



*I'm not sure
I've got
this right*

"Yes I can!"

From 12.45 on Friday through to 3.30pm

Our discussion on the Friday morning should help to pave the way for us to ask ourselves a challenging question over lunch, as we move into the third stage of this Conversation when we want to think through how we might each **maximise our impact for the good**, as facilitative leaders.

Think of a moment over the next few weeks ...

We want to ask you to think of a moment over the next few weeks when you expect to facilitate a conversation with your team, or a group of colleagues or partners, and would like those involved to be able to look back on it and describe it as useful and creative - and (that dreaded word!) "strategic".



Almost certainly, it will be a moment that makes you feel that unless you gear up to it properly beforehand and think through how you intend to handle the discussion at each stage, you won't achieve as much through it as you might wish to do.

So, in groups over lunch we would like to ask you to consider two questions:

- If one aspect of your leadership style can hold you back from achieving what you want when you are pouring your energy into a facilitation, **what would that be?**
- How might you best get ahead of the game now and ensure that you really **play to your strengths**, so that you come out of the ideas-building session in a few weeks time **excited** by what you and the group have achieved together?

We hope that each table will nominate one of your number to share **their own story** with us after lunch, drawing out the lessons they take away from your discussion.

What might you **SAY** differently?

As we go through the afternoon we hope to risk up our thinking that bit more, and really stretch ourselves until we hit the buffers at 3.30pm on the dot.

At this stage, we are thinking that we should ask you to focus on your ideas about what you should say to a group during **your first few minutes** of leading them through a strategic ideas-building process.



Across around 40 Leadership Conversations now, we have found that those that turned out to be the very best were ones that felt as if we all just jelled as a group during the first few minutes. It was as if we all made up our mind that the Conversation was going to work for us - and it did!

So, in the final few minutes of this Leadership Conversation we want to ask what you think **you might say**, that's different from the sorts of things that you would have said anyway, during the first few minutes of your next strategic ideas-building conversation.

A pool of ideas

This should generate a pool of ideas that we can all draw on to enable each of us to sharpen up **our distinctive styles** as facilitative leaders and enable those with whom we work most closely to "live possible futures".

Yes we can!



Agenda

Thursday, April 30th 2020

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>)
5.50pm	Vicars' Hall. Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: <i>This is me!</i> We break for small groups and when we return we encourage you to share some aspect of your personal story that helps other Fellows understand how you would most like to develop your role in facilitating strategic ideas-building
7.40pm	Free time/ drinks in the Sitting Room of St George's House
8.15pm	Working dinner in the House Dining Room
9.30pm	We go through to the Sitting room for tea/coffee with port or brandy
9.45pm	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing from the Sitting Room (<i>optional</i>). After the tour, please join us for a nightcap

Friday, May 1st

7.45am	Breakfast is served. Please clear your personal belongings from your room and bring them down to the Vicars' Hall, so that the domestic staff can prepare our rooms for the next group
8.45am	We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall. At 10.00am or earlier we move on to Stage 2: <i>Tell us more</i> (page 7). We move in and out of small groups as we identify specific challenges that require quality thinking time. We capture key "take aways" as we go and at around 12.30 prepare for Stage 3: <i>Yes I can!</i> (page 8)
12.45pm	A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups. At 1.40 we have a team photo on the West steps of the Chapel (<i>weather permitting!</i>)
1.45pm	Back together as one group, we draw out the key outcomes of our lunchtime discussions. We prepare for our final round of small groups, after which we invite each of you to sharpen up your personal resolves to enable you to become more effective as leaders in facilitating strategic ideas-building sessions. We close the Conversation promptly at 3.30pm .



Video link-up: July 21 2020

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up in July to hear how much progress we have each made in taking forward our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in July is for Fellows to share a brief email beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which one you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!

Suggested time for Video Link-up:
3.00 to 4.00pm on Tuesday, July 21st 2020

**Please click the
cover to open
the report**



Leaders as facilitators

*Insights from two
Leadership Conversations*

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