Connection and Community

From 10.30am until 4.30pm on Tuesday June 1st

The capacity to collaborate is crucial to survival in a threatening environment, and almost everyone we speak to refers to new connections and relationships opening up once the illusion of our self-dependence was shattered by Covid. This Conversation will be of interest to those seeking to work across boundaries, whether hierarchical, functional, demographic or cultural – particularly trying to sustain some of the generative practices and possibilities opened up during the pandemic where so much goodwill, initiative and innovation became possible. What deeper changes are we trying to make, within and across our organisations, to sustain new forms of collaboration and connection?

One of the early surprises during COVID was the expression of community that sprung up, from musicians on their balconies in Italy, to the overwhelming response to Sir Tom Moore's 100 laps and the countless consideration in villages across the country to keep the elderly, lonely and shielded provided for.

And of course we have turned to a raft of new technologies, 'Zoom and Teams', simply because we had to – and found their colossal benefits as well as their natural limitations. Another feature of lockdown was the 'levelling' effect of Zoom – hierarchy being diminished and listening increased as everyone had their equal share of screen space.

Yet Modern society is still plagued by fragmentation and there is a real risk that we will revert to these in even more extreme ways as the economic imperatives emerging from the pandemic start to make themselves felt. The various sectors of our communities--businesses, schools, social service organizations, churches, government--do not work together. They exist in their own worlds. As do so many individual citizens, who long for connection but end up marginalized, their gifts overlooked, their potential contributions lost. This disconnection and detachment makes it hard if not impossible to envision a common future and work towards it together. We know what healthy communities look like--there are many success stories out there, and they have been described in detail by authors such as Peter Block ('The structure of Belonging').

What is our real learning from this? What old structures are getting in the way? What is our sense of what is possible now, if only....? And how do we keep our hope alive, our sense of what is really possible, in the face of the apparent rigidities that seem to characterize our organizational systems? One thing is for sure, the breaking free of old structures and power relationships is not without significant (perceived) risk. How can we as Fellows strengthen each other in this?