



Connection and Community

From 10.15am 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?



Agenda

The Conversation will follow the traditional flow, following three key stages:

- **This is Me** – taking stock of where we find ourselves currently in relation to this theme and the questions that are arising
- **Tell Us More** – enquiring more deeply into our learning and insights as we probe into this experience
- **Yes I can, Yes I will** – turning wisdom and insight into intention and practice.

This is me

We begin with an honest and frank enquiry into our own experience of building community as the social fabric of our organisation. What it really takes to initiate, to strengthen, to grow. What happens when community is driven by survival, or drawn to possibility? In this phase of the conversation we will encourage you to share your own stories and learning journey on how communities shape us, what we welcome and abandon in our-selves, our belonging. What have you learned from your experience so far? What has changed in the part 'community' plays in the health of your organisation? How do you stay with the 'heart' for community, for reciprocity, without it becoming another task or weight of responsibility? What happens to boundaries as communities become established?

As we share our stories we will find some key themes emerging amongst us – some simple practicalities to notice and share but also the beginnings of the deeper knowing we are accessing here. As we look back over our own journey of communing and withdrawing, of over and under done, what is it that we start to see? What are the little warning signs we have learned to notice and conditions that tell us there is something non-obvious we need to be attending to, what are the seeds of possibility emerging?



Tell Us More

This takes us towards the end of the morning into the second phase of the discussion which will then inform our thinking over a break for lunch and a reflective walk. What is the **discerning wisdom** we need to access here that helps us know when and how to intervene and when to let be. How do we access this wisdom? What questions do we need to ask of ourselves and others? How do we ask these questions in a way that unlocks generativity and intelligence, rather than fear and self-protection?

Following our reflection and presencing in this enquiry, sharing the deeper knowing of the heart and gut as well as the head, we will move into the closing phase the conversation ...

Yes I can

Here we crystalise the insights from our wisdom into our own intentions and commitments as leaders. What do we want to take forward in our practice, or further enquiry? What is becoming clear to us in terms of practical changes we need to make:

- In terms of where we personally want to make more connection and build or strengthen community, beyond rigid, established, maybe out-dated structures and boundaries
- How we are sensing the mood for this in others
- How we encourage shared responsibility for a climate of passion and purpose over the long term
- Any specific interventions or conversations we know we need to initiate on our return.



Timings:

1000	Arrivals refreshments and introductions
1030	Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: This is me. We break into small groups and share some aspect of your personal story
1045	We develop the conversation and begin to pull out some of the patterns and connections in our sharing. What is our discerning of how this theme is playing out around us? What is our responsibility in it? What is not? What are the very real dilemmas it brings for us as today's leaders?
1130	Tea and Coffee Break
1150	We move into the second phase of the conversation: tell us more. We identify the rich seams in what has been shared and mine these. This involves us accessing the deeper knowing that lies beneath our experience.
1300	Break for lunch and personal reflection, usually a walk, alone or in pairs. What is really speaking to us in this? Where can we make a difference?
1400	Back together as one group, we draw out the key outcomes of our lunchtime discussions and the deeper significance of these for our stance as leaders.
1445	Moving into the third phase, 'Yes I can', 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 who make a point of "reflecting peaceful strength" in the mirror.
1500	Tea and Coffee Break
1520	We work on helping each other sharpen our commitments and intentions and develop a personal practice to help manage this duality on an ongoing basis.
1615	Closing words and insights, finishing the Conversation promptly at 4.30 pm.
