



# Organisations as Conversations

**From 10.00am until 4.30pm on Wednesday November 3rd**

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*"In language we build our own identities, our relationships with others, the countries that we live in, the companies that we have and the values that we hold dear. With language we generate life."* Fernando Flores

This conversation will look at the extraordinary power we possess as leaders to shape both our own and others' experience of reality through language. It will aim to help us be more alert to the power of language and more attentive, purposeful, and often more subtle, in our interventions.

From:

Science or story

Structure or Process

Strategy or culture

To:

Story and science

Process and structure

Culture and strategy

When we consider our organisation as process, it becomes clear conversation underpins the context and climate we operate in and the contribution we make. Conversations form the basis of trusting relationships, they often enliven our ambition, awaken possibilities, drive purposeful and courageous action.

What do we know of the conversations that are taking place in our organisations and what they are causing above and below the surface? Are they life giving, releasing energy, creating flow in the system, enabling and ennobling us to navigate the paradoxes and complexities of organisational life? Or, are they life draining, acting as a virus in the system, causing ineffectiveness and friction, impacting the health, vitality and energy of individuals and organisations as a whole? How are the conversations that are not being had, those that are being contained or postponed, impacting us? Changing the way we talk can change the way we work.

## **Pre work observation**

From complaint to commitment, blame to responsibility, from assumptions that hold us to assumptions we hold. For 1 week, immediately prior to joining this conversation, please observe the conversations taking place in your organisation. Please catch the snippets of conversation you pick up on as you pass people, catch the tone and style of conversation in meetings – pay particular attention for just 5 minutes in a range of meetings. Please stop twice a day to capture, simply in 5 bar gate form, the nature of conversations you have experienced, be they, for example:

- With or without ambition
- Can do or reasons why not
- Trusting or Defending
- Advocacy or Inquiry
- Stretching or settling
- Including or Excluding
- Dialogue or discussion

What insights do you gain from seeing the patterns emerging?



## Agenda

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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

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We begin by sharing what it was that drew us to this conversation and something of the nature of conversation taking place in our own organisations. What surprised us when we looked more closely, what disappointed as the veil was lifted, what excites us about the seeds of possibility.

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 inviting, participating in and letting go of conversations, what do we notice? What does conversation mean to us in different settings, the Vicars Hall, in our organisation, in intimate spaces? What are the subtle signs that the quality of conversations are serving or not serving our ambition? If, "you are what you say", who are you and who are you becoming?

### Tell Us More

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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 our-selves 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**

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Here we crystallise 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 and how we personally want to change the nature of our conversations
- How we are sensing the mood for this in others
- How we re-awaken the art of life giving conversation in our organisations
- Any specific interventions or conversations we know we need to initiate on our return.



## Timings:

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0930	Arrivals, refreshments and introductions
1000	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
1030	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. 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 in changing conversations.
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 on-going basis.
1615	Closing words and insights, finishing the Conversation promptly at 4.30 pm.

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