



Rehumanising Working Life

From 6pm on Thursday 5th May until 3.30pm on Friday 6th

Are we losing the 'human touch' in our ways of working? What has our experience in the pandemic helped us see in relation to this? Are people increasingly being 'instrumentalised' by new expectations of performativity, new patterns of social control, including digital, AI, the new 'machine age' and other forces? What is the impact on mental health and performance? Why has 'wellbeing' become such a factor in our organisational lives? Is it working...?

This Conversation will explore what we are noticing about our leadership contexts in recent times - are they getting 'harder' or 'softer', 'tougher' or 'kinder', more or less tolerant and patient, more or less 'human'? And what are the underlying forces driving this? We will also, in true St Georges style, hold the mirror up to ourselves – how are we finding it personally? How is our experience of leadership changing? Is something different needed from us in these times? What are we learning as we evolve our leadership? What is best practice nowadays?

In this Conversation we will be exploring the wisdom in all of us about what it means to be human living and working in the 21st Century. As leaders what is being called for in these times and how have we each found ourselves seeking to respond to it? What do we feel good about, what do we feel less good about? What is this telling us? We hope that in this field in particular where we are working with our own best judgement in often quite challenging situations that this sharing of our emerging experience will help us discern where the best way forward lies and what practical tips, approaches and mindsets will best serve us.

Our experience during the pandemic has probably had a lasting impact on social relations at work. The experience of seeing people in their homes on video calls, the blurring of home and working life and personas, the simple need to look out for each other and pay attention to each other's wellbeing – all these things have probably increased.



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But in a way this has also served to highlight some of the dehumanising forces that have long been in play in our working contexts, and may still be increasing; how easy it is to relate to each other 'functionally' rather than as whole people. The reach of IT further and further into behavioural measurement; the fear that comes with feeling constantly observed; how we instinctively feel 'guilt' if we 'waste' time; how we lose patience and tolerance with others who don't perform to our standards – and then beyond all this the impact of automation, AI and post Covid restructuring and work patterning. All these things create new forms of tension and potential conflict in the pattern of working life. And we find ourselves as leaders trying to mediate and anticipate these.

One response has been more attention to 'wellbeing', but some critique this as sticking plaster at best and at worst an active collusion with the instrumentalism of our working life. And how 'genuine' are our attempts to rehumanise work? Are we at risk of losing something simple – basic human qualities such as care and connection, joy and spontaneity?

We hope this will be a very practical Conversation – a real opportunity to learn from each other and to discern what is currently playing itself out in the social fabric of working life, using our gut and heart knowing as well as our head - so that we can act before it becomes too late.....

Agenda

The Conversation will flow through 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 from our experience
- **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 will open the Conversation with a reminder of what it is to be human, sharing stories of what we see as 'humanising' and 'de-humanising' aspects of working life. How have we experienced this personally, possibly unintentionally contributing to it as leaders? Where have we seen it playing out in the lives of those around us? What has been our own learning of trying to 're-humanise' working life? The term 'humanising the work-place' was first used 100 years ago, to solve the problems of mechanised factory systems. How far have we come? What has the pandemic shone a light on or brought a circuit breaker to in working life in our organisations and society in general? What distortions have crept in that are now visible?



“Tell Us More”

With an increasingly psychologically sophisticated workforce, what is expected of working life and what will no longer be tolerated? How are we, as leaders, balancing the conflicting demands of stakeholders and constraints of systems with a deep desire to fix what seems to be broken.

This takes us into the second phase of the Conversation where, based on the insights we have shared, we will explore the theme in more depth – both from our own perspective and that of our times.

We explore these deeper insights, patterns and emerging issues through 3 lenses:

- **Individual**

What is self-driven - a natural human desire to achieve, succeed and belong, to be recognised, to grow - that has us stretch to the point of losing touch with our own humanity? Where does responsibility lie for this? What role does fear play?

- **Organisation / System**

What is system-driven that tends to dehumanise or exacerbate those natural fears and desires above? What role does technology play, for better or for worse?

- **Societal**

What is societally driven that has seeped into our ways of working over time that now needs to be radically re-considered.



“Yes I can!”

The final phase of the Conversation will have us, after a period of reflection, crystallising these insights into specific intentions and commitment, and ongoing personal practices, that will support us in our aim of 're-humanising working life'. What is our part in this and how do we keep ourselves grounded in our own behaviour? What can we be doing to shift culture, climate, expectations and patterns around us? This is where the experience of the Leadership Fellows will really come into its own as we challenge each other to be both bold and realistic in what we seek to step into.

This will then form the basis of something of a 'social experiment' between the close of the Conversation and our subsequent video link-up. What have we tried and what have been the learnings and insights as we have done this? Our hope would be that as a group you will be motivated to continue in this enquiry for a couple of further follow up sessions.



Timings: Thursday 5th May

- 1430 You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House
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- 1630 Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
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- 1705 Evensong (*optional*)
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- 1750 **Vicars' Hall.** Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: ***This is me!*** We break for small groups and when we return we encourage you to share some aspect of your personal story that helps other Fellows gain a sense of why this theme matters to you.
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- 1930 Free time/drinks in the Sitting Room No. 25 The Cloisters
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- 1945 Working dinner in the House Dining Room
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- 2115 We go back to the Sitting Room for tea/coffee, and after dinner drinks
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- 2145 Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room (*optional*).
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Friday 6th May

- 0745 Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your personal belongings from your room and bring them down to the Vicars' Hall, so that the domestic staff can service the rooms for the next group.
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- 0845 We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall to reflect further on what was shared yesterday. At roughly 10.00am we move on to Stage 2: **Tell us more.** We move in and out of small groups as we identify specific aspects and challenges in our different situations that require more focused attention and quality thinking time. We capture key insights and take-aways as we go and at around 12.30 start preparing for Stage 3: **Yes I can!**
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Friday 6th May cont...

1245 A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups, reflecting on how our insights from the morning are speaking directly to us and our intentions as leaders. At 1.40 we have a team photo on the West steps of the Chapel (weather permitting!)

1345 Back together as one group, we draw out the key outcomes of our lunchtime discussions and reflections. 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 a leader in how you handle the patterns you see playing out. We close the Conversation promptly at 3.30pm.

Video link-up:

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up in June 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 this 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 date and time:

Thursday 30th June 10.30am -11.30am