



The 'Character' of an organisation and how it is different from 'culture'

From 6pm on Thursday 30th June until 3.30pm on Friday 1st July

The character of our organisations has been tested in recent years, irreversible courses of action have been taken that shape our identity. Building character is not a fixed state for us as individuals, nor is it for our organisations it is rather a life-long process of becoming that gets seen most starkly when tested.

How do we define character and differentiate it from culture?

In its simplest form, culture is the sum of the practices, customs and behaviours of an organisation, where character is more the mental and moral qualities. Where culture is an identity, character is a quality that we imbibe, the mental and ethical traits or compass that reside within whether seen or unseen.

We build character not in one off training events, but by inquiry into our experiences, exploring ethical dilemmas together, by creating a safe place for reflection when minor lapses occur, by holding objective pre- and post-mortems for initiatives with ethical components, by mentoring, by corporate moral reflection.

It can be hard to face these inquiries in a world of deadlines and habits. To pause and notice our defining moments, the apparent small decisions with the potential to shape the character of our organisation and maybe even our industry. In this Conversation we seek to see beyond a pattern of rationalised behaviours to the maturing character and 'standing' of our organisation.

This Conversation lies within our theme of growth. Work plays such a huge role in many of our teams lives and work and life are more tightly intertwined than ever before (a trend exacerbated by the pandemic). We are likely to face ethical situations at work that we might not encounter anywhere else. People don't enter the work-place with a fixed moral character and so how do we contribute to and nurture the moral development or evolution of our people? Is that a role that we are willing to embrace more consciously?



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As we look at our own leadership we notice the powerful forces that press in on us from all sides that have the potential to shift our compass, and we are not alone. Are we caught or conscious in our responses?

As you look at your own organisations through the lens of 'building character', what do you see?

How has this been shaped over the last couple of years?

How are the founding principles still alive and resonant?

What would you like to shift, e.g. behaviours that are tolerated that should no longer be tolerated, or opportunities that are missed?

How are you personally aligned?

This Conversation will be of particular interest to Fellows who are considering the moral and ethical contribution of their organisation to society.

The nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote,

"I believe it is precisely through the presence of opposites and the feelings they occasion that the great man—the bow with great tension—develops."



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 sharing of stories of where we find ourselves at, contradictions and tensions within those stories and the nature of 'character defining' dilemmas we are facing. We will look honestly at defining moments in our own organisations, for good or for ill, those moments that have shifted the compass dial.

We will explore the patterns of behaviour or prototyping of decision making that takes place, the rationalising of decisions, the breakpoints where decisions have been stopped in their tracks.

What are the emotions that underpin our leadership choices at these times, fear or courage?

What is the prevailing mind-set that underpins the character of your organisation, be it about time, about service, about contribution? Why is this Conversation important to you, now?



“Tell Us More”

This takes us into the second phase of the Conversation where we will explore these insights in more depth.

What is the state of mind we need to be preserving in order to be proactive in the maturing of our organisation's character?

What are the practices that serve to build character and deepen trust in each other's responses to the many demands and dilemmas in the world around us?
What do I do with what I see today?

This will be an honest and empathic enquiry, with other leaders of considerable experience and a deep desire to learn and lead well. There are no 'fixes' in this space, it takes courage to see, to step in, to work with and through the complexities of leadership today.

We will therefore be exploring what it really takes to build the character of a thriving business over the longer term in a world where the under-current of immediacy is so prevalent.

“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. 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 30th June

1430	You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House
1630	Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
1705	Evensong (<i>optional</i>)
1750	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 gain an insight into defining moments that have tested or are testing the character of your organisation internally and externally.
1930	Free time/drinks in the Sitting Room No. 25 The Cloisters
1945	Working dinner in the House Dining Room
2115	We go back to the Sitting Room for tea/coffee, and after dinner drinks
2145	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room (<i>optional</i>).

Friday 1st July

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.
0845	We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall. At 10.00am or earlier 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 on practices that build character and align behaviours. At around 12.15 we prepare for Stage 3: Yes I can!



Friday 1st July 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 in leading others to define and shape the character of your organisation. 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 September 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:

Wednesday 21st September 10.00am -11.00am