



# Leading with wisdom on The Board

From 10.00am to 4.30pm on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April

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This Conversation seeks to provide a space for us to share our experience and insight of the changing dynamics of leadership on the Board – for those of us who work on Boards, or want to work on them and also for those of us that work with or through them.

In these times of complexity, uncertainty and rapid change, there is now so much focus and sophistication in supporting the quality of leadership, engagement and dialogue within our organisations, but to what extent is this also true of the life of our Boards? Is there more we should be doing to renew and realign the way we lead on the Board, given the scale of change we are now facing into?

In this Conversation we will share experiences, insights and concerns from our experience on and with the Board in order to discern any significant themes and priorities emerging. What is the wisdom that is really needed on the Board in these times and how could we be enhancing our effectiveness in the light of this?

As well as sharing the wisdom from our own experience we also hope to invite an input from an expert in contemporary Board dynamics to provoke our thinking in response to this question.

## 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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After a brief process of arriving and connecting, we will begin the conversation by sharing something of our own story of life on or with the Board – some of the highs and lows and the learning process we have been through as a result.

We will also air and explore some of our current concerns and observations about how life on the Board is changing in the light both of ever increasing governance requirements on the one hand and of the need for sensitive and light touch enquiry and coaching styles on the other.

As we share our own enquiry and lay out our experience of Board Leadership in action we expect there will be an immediate practical exchange of ideas and leanings from the conversation – practical learnings that people have found helpful along the way and key pitfalls to avoid.

Beneath this we will discern the deeper forces at play, some of which are likely to be common to us all – underlying psychological, relational and systemic drivers that are shaping the quality of dialogue and interaction and ultimately the effectiveness of the Board

## "Tell Us More"

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After our mid-morning break we start to enquire more deeply and critically reflect on the dynamics we are discerning. This is about 'seeing our seeing' and challenging our-selves to find different perspectives.

Alongside the healthy peer challenge we will naturally engender, we hope to bring at least one 'challenger' into the room, someone with a specialist expertise in Board leadership, to help us reframe our thinking and attitudes and hopefully expand our sense of what is possible when we view this through a different lens. (We will confirm who as soon as possible).

In particular, we will explore our experience and awareness of the complex and powerful forces at play today that are driving change in the role and significance of the Board – and therefore demanding so much more from the quality and nature of interaction, (both within and around formal meetings and processes).



# "Tell Us More"

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This will provide an opportunity for us to challenge our-selves and each other about patterns and assumptions that we operate from as leaders in and around the Board.

A particular aspect of course is how we define our own role, purpose and contribution. Where are we genuinely adding value, based on a deep discernment and understanding of the issues at play where are we maybe just adding noise by forcing our own perspective into a much more subtle reality.

We will take time to explore our role in facilitating the quality of dialogue and the balance of attention in Board interactions. How and when do we lift the level of questioning to stimulate what one Board member called 'purposeful musing' - a different level and energy of discussion.

How and when do we need to drill down and start 'nailing accountability' - all with the wisdom and humility to recognise that we rarely know the whole picture? In particular how do we develop our subtlety in 'listening between the lines', sensing, often in a quite instinctive way that there is something going on that may need to be surfaced.

Equally for those of us in Executive roles, how do we examine our own assumption and attitudes towards our Boards and Chairs? How are we engaging in the relationship to make it what it is meant to be, rather than the old adage of 'getting this past the Board' or 'winning the Board over'!

A key requisite to effective leadership on Boards is high 'self and other awareness' and this is something we will also explore in some depth in this phase of the conversation. Not just in how we embody it ourselves but also in how we stimulate it and release it in Board interactions, so that we are able to achieve a level of authenticity in the dialogue which leads to open and fruitful engagement. How do we build honesty and trust in the Boardroom, recognising the complex set of forces at play that inject a natural wariness into the process?

Following these provocations and explorations, we will then move into the more practical phase in the conversation working before and after lunch in small groups on specific themes that are speaking to each of us in our own situations. How are we being invited to rethink our presence and contribution in our Board settings? What possibilities start to arise from this, how will we re-prioritise our own focus? Where may we seek to intervene to create shift, from subtle 'nudging' through to intervention that is more direct? What will it take for us to be able to pursue this?



# "Yes I can!"

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In the final phase of the Conversation, during the afternoon, we will help each other solidify our own insights and intentions – not just the practical aspects of how we redefine our focus, but also the subtle aspects: how we refine the grace and elegance of our interventions, how we create the right 'atmosphere' through our own presence and embodiment.

We will close the Conversation with a pause to notice and 'hoover up' all the wisdom that has been gleaned and shared – big and small, from deep insights to practical little tips. Finally we will pair up to help each other to firm up on our specific commitments and intentions - and maybe even offer to stay in touch from time to time to help each other with this...



## Timings: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April

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0930	Arrivals, refreshments and introductions
1000	Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: <b><i>This is me!</i></b> 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 in 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?
1115	Tea and Coffee break
1140	We move into the second phase of the Conversation: <b><i>Tell us more.</i></b> 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: <b><i>Yes I can!</i></b> we prepare for our final round of small groups, after which we invite each of you to sharpen up your personal resolves in pair 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 sustain our leadership focus on an ongoing basis.
1615	Closing words and insights, finishing the Conversation promptly at 4.30pm.

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