



LEADING IN A POLARISED WORLD

From 6.00pm on Wednesday 18th June until 4.00pm on Thursday 19th

This is a topic that seems to be emerging as one of the most important amongst our Fellows. Whether it is people 'entrenching' around diversity issues, or the hardening of political positions, or a tendency to resort to legalistic process instead of dialogue, more and more we are encountering situations with people entrenched deeply in polarities and/or experiencing a climate where there is an inherent tendency for people to spin off rapidly into polarised positions.

Our purpose in this Conversation is both to seek to understand this more fully – what is driving this polarisation – as well as to share wisdom as leaders about how to handle this tendency to polarise and harness it as a productive force.

We will cover:

- "Us v them" : Understanding the dynamics of polarisation in order to mitigate and channel the energy of conflict.
- The 'Ladder of Inference': Exploring personal biases and their role in escalating conflicts.
- The Impact of Polarisation: The challenges of facilitating dialogue among divided groups.
- Balancing Conformity and Conflict: Navigating the tension between fitting in and asserting diversity.
- Perspective: Enriching inner awareness to better understand our own and others' viewpoints.
- Adaptability and Flexibility: being versatile and resilient in our leadership, inspired by the philosophy of 'being like water'.
- Polarity Management: Using a polarity management tool applied to our own contexts to unlock the power and wisdom of 'harnessing opposites'
- Intervention: Focusing on strategic, high leverage, interventions – minimum effort, maximum effect - and the importance of timing.
- Growth Through Extremes: how embracing the extremes can catalyse personal and professional growth, if we can bear it.



AGENDA

Who is this for?

This Conversation will be of particular relevance to anyone trying to move things forward in situations characterised by increasing conflict, impatience and intolerance – whether overtly expressed or 'buried' in sclerotic, underperforming systems.

How will it flow?

This will be both an enquiry into the 'nature of our times' as well as a practical sharing of wisdom concerning how to work with polarity – harnessing its positive dynamics and minimising its negative ones.

Following our usual three-phase structure, the Conversation will proceed as follows:

- **"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!”

In this opening phase, we will share personal stories about the ways we are experiencing polarisation playing itself out for better and for worse in our lives and leadership roles.



Who are the 'Us' and who are the 'them' in our lives? We will share and explore why and where we find polarity to be healthy or unhealthy in our different contexts.

We will ground these in specific insights arising from when we handled polarities powerfully and effectively on the one hand – and when and how they span out of control on the other. This will set the platform for us to explore the dynamics of 'leading in polarities' in more depth.

“TELL US MORE”

In this next phase of the Conversation, we will apply some tools for self-reflection and polarity management to see this topic 'with new eyes'. This will cover:

- The Leadership role in handling polarity. When are we part of the problem and when the solution - outside looking in, or inside looking out?
- How we self-calibrate if and when are we part of the problem – catching our own judgements, conscious and unconscious biases, via the 'ladder of inference'
- Self-reflection: where am I, rightly or wrongly, consciously or blindly, in polarised positions?
- 'Position taking':
 - When it is right to stand my ground and represent a polarity with vigour, recognising the system may need it even though it doesn't welcome it?
 - When it is right to compromise and embrace a broader perspective?

“TELL US MORE”

- The skills and wisdom of mediating between opposing forces or factions.
- Sensing into the subtle 'tipping points' where 'right' becomes 'wrong'
- Using a polarity mapping tool to take a more systemic view - and how we socialise this systemic perspective into our context
- The skills and subtlety of intervening to shift the energy and dynamics
 - Timing of...
 - Psychology and emotion of...
 - Politics of...
- The 'polarity of myself' – managing and discerning some of the inherent dilemmas of leadership in these complex situations. When to be:
 - Patient or demanding
 - Tolerant or intolerant
 - Front seat or back seat
 - Directive or inclusive

Recognising that people will come into the Conversation with different needs and perspective we will create small group streams to explore the different aspects of this, from the strategic to the personal to the interpersonal.

We will then pull these together at the end to provide an overall picture in which we can look at our own leadership. This will inform the choices we make as we move into the next phase of the Conversation...



“YES I CAN!”

In the closing phase of the Conversation, we will reflect on where and how the insights generated above have relevant value and practical implications for our own leadership.

This will be where we support and challenge each other to get more specific about the changes we would like to be making. In particular:

- Where and how we can intervene to shift some of the unhealthy polarisations that are taking place in our context.
- Where we want to rebalance our leadership by toning down or ramping up our own position on certain things.
- Where and how we can change the emotional climate to engender a different energy/climate in relation to polarisation in our teams and organisations.

Having formed and clarified our own intentions as we leave the conversation, there will then be the opportunity to support each other in reviewing the learning from these in a follow up call a couple of months afterwards.





Timings: Wednesday 18th June

- 1430** You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House.
-
- 1630** Tea/ Coffee available in the Sitting Room of the House.
-
- 1705** Evening Prayer (*optional*).
-
- 1750** **Vicars' Hall.** Gathering together. Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: **"This is me!"** We work in small groups sharing our stories and experience.
-
- 2000** Working dinner in the House Dining Room.
-
- 2130** 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 (*optional*).
-

Thursday 19th June

- 0745** Breakfast in the Dining Room of St George's House. Please clear your personal belongings from your room and bring them down to the Vicars' Hall, so that the staff can prepare the rooms for the next group.
-
- 0845** We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall and begin by noticing what is present to us as we start the new day, working in small groups and as a larger group. As we share our experiences and questions, we identify specific aspects and challenges in our different situations that require more focused attention and quality thinking time. At roughly 1030, we move on to Stage 2: **"Tell us more"**, where we start to 'mine' these topics for the wisdom that can unlock them.
-
- 1100** Break for tea/coffee.
-



Thursday 19th June cont...

- 1130** **'Tell us more' cont...** Working in a variety of pair/trio or small group conversations, we delve together into the particular issues that have most resonance and significance for us.
-
- 1300** A hot buffet lunch in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups, reflecting on how our insights from the morning are speaking to us and our intentions as leaders.
- At 1.50 we have a team photo on the West steps of the Chapel (weather permitting!)
-
- 1400** Back together as one group, we draw out our lunchtime reflections and engage in our final round of small group work as we clarify and solidify our intentions. Where is the invitation for each of us more fully to embody the wisdom we are accessing?
-
- 1500** We invite each of you to work in pairs or trios over tea or coffee to sharpen up your personal resolves and commitments in the light of your intentions.
-
- 1545** Closing words and 'gathering up' of the wisdom that has flowed, however large or small.
-
- 1600** Conversation close.
-

Video link-up:

At the end of the Conversation, we will confirm the arrangements for our follow-up zoom call to check in on the progress we have each made in progressing our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in this is for Fellows to post a brief Whatsapp beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have been getting on, and especially which ones you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!

Suggested date and time: tbc