

“Convening, Discerning, & Dialogue: a learning workshop for leading disruption.”

Abstract

It is clear that one of the most pressing needs of the world right now is for humankind to communicate more thoughtfully and skillfully about difficult, contentious issues. To achieve this involves developing appropriate practices for engaging with diverse viewpoints by improving interpersonal interactions through a human-centered approach. Without such practices, we are left with imposed change, divisive, even hateful rhetoric, and violence as responses to controversial issues.

It is also essential that we engage collectively to address the challenges we are facing and how people collaborate says something about the values of the system within which they operate. While many would agree that the pressing, systemic challenges and the contentious issues we are currently facing as communities and organizations, would benefit from inclusive leadership, yet we still struggle with how to work together to address systems change.

Each of the designers of this session is passionate about these topics and recognizes the importance of developing tools and strategies for convening, discerning, and actively engaging in dialogue, a capability of particular significance for those exercising leadership. Drawing from various disciplines, including sociology, psychotherapy, law, human resources, coaching, management, and leadership, this workshop will give participants the opportunity to experience a range of interrelated processes to catalyze discussion, reflection, and skill development.

By introducing practices such as the World Cafe dialogue method, and integrating two different facilitation approaches, we apply the fundamentals of convening, dialogue, and discernment and expand our knowledge as we seek together to discover what emerges in the system. We do this by promoting active listening, careful observation, personal reflection, and participatory questioning. We will engage with participants in two sessions to help people draw links to the leadership implications and the system change potential of particular practices, thus connecting the process to the substantive issues that are the underlying motivation for why people need to develop these skills and use these methods. Aligned with this, we will broaden our understanding of convening as more than a tool, seeing it as a disruptive innovation that can contribute towards system change.

The women leading this session have years of experience across forums including chairing commissions and agencies, facilitating meetings, coaching teams, board leadership in nonprofit and civic organizations, stakeholder engagement as consultants and business owners, organizational change efforts, as World Café leaders, hosting Appreciative Enquiry summits, broadcast journalism, leading teams and facilitating leadership development efforts in universities and research groups, and guiding exploratory sessions among diverse sets of interests. In partnership with participants’ own knowledge and shared experiences we hope to promote further dialogue, discernment and convening.

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Facilitators

Cheryl Getz, PhD, is a former women's college basketball coach and as such has worked with groups and teams for over 30 years. She has been trained, certified and/or has experiences with Appreciative Inquiry, Conflict Resolution, Healing Collective Trauma, Polyvagal theory as it relates to equity in higher education, Restorative Justice Practices, Indigenous practices, Group Relations pedagogy, and Action Inquiry. She has chaired, convened, and facilitated global dialogues with leaders from across the globe, as well as meetings with teams, groups, committees, etc. Cheryl is Associate Professor, Leadership Studies, University of San Diego.

Joanna Stanberry, MA, has served as an organizational development consultant using participatory learning approaches, and while on the board of an emerging nonprofit, developed its strategic plan working across groups of stakeholders and mediating to advance common goals. She has bridged between organizational goals and homeless clients in her work in a major charity and staffed immersive emotional health weekend conferences for women facilitating group planning processes, coaching speakers, and hosting participants. Joanna is currently a postgraduate researcher at the Initiative for Leadership and Sustainability at the University of Cumbria, Ambleside, UK.

Liane Weintraub is a journalist (MA, USC Annenberg School), a psychologist (MA, Pepperdine University), and a Ph.D. student (Pepperdine University) whose research focuses on affective polarization and addressing the breakdown in civil discourse. She has extensive experience leading one-on-one and group discussions. Her current work centers on dialogue as a means to build bridges among people who disagree about challenging or polarizing topics. Her forthcoming dissertation examines the impact of dialogic interactions on social attitudes and assumptions.

Sarah Chace, Ed.D. is an associate professor of leadership studies at Christopher Newport University. Since 2001, she has been studying and writing about leadership, beginning with her graduate work at the Harvard Kennedy School, which led to a project that formed the basis of her book *Advancing the Development of Urban School Superintendents through Adaptive Leadership* (Routledge, 2019). In the last few years, she has turned her attention to Critical Leadership Studies.

Suze Wilson, PhD, Fellow of the International Leadership Association, is a senior lecturer at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research examines issues of power, identity, gender, ethics, discourse, practice/s, context, character, communication and crisis as they pertain to leadership and its development. Prior to becoming an academic Suze worked in HR, OD, industrial relations and management consulting roles for many years, as part of which she gained extensive experience in a wide range of group facilitation and conflict resolution techniques, including via the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Janis Bragan Balda, PhD, as an international nonprofit attorney and educator has served in multiple roles within a variety of forms of convening including Appreciative Inquiry summits, Quaker decision-making, public hearings, committee and information gathering sessions, community forums, dispute resolution processes, program assessments, interorganizational collaborations, participant panels and implementation of organizational directives in business, the social sector, religious organizations and in educational settings. She is a senior lecturer, Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.