## Reflections from the Windsor Leadership Dialogue

The Windsor Leadership Dialogue (WLD) is an annual two-day event that was started in 2001. It takes place at St George's House in the grounds of Windsor Castle and is for invited senior leaders from a broad range of organisations to discuss the leadership needed to sustain a successful future. The whole event is run under Chatham House rules.

Since the first WLD twelve years ago, we have all experienced a fast-changing world that holds implications for leadership. For example, hierarchical reporting is being affected by the easy and rapid availability of information via the internet and mobile devices. This accelerates change in and of society, generating new expectations about democracy and social order. Future generations are unlikely to tolerate traditional models of leadership and will seek different paradigms and less management-dominated work relationships.

The new sciences of complexity and chaos theory (the 'butterfly effect') have clarified and challenged our understanding of the increasingly complex situations that leaders encounter and need to surmount. And the latest neuroscience research helps explain many default behaviours including the phenomenon of hubris to which some leaders succumb.

I have had the privilege to be one of the custodians of the event for the last two years which is facilitated in a very collaborative format. The broad theme is "All Change for Leadership" and at this year's event (26-27th January 2015) we focused on "Collaborative Leadership in a World of Increasing Complexity".

Whether through re-inventing our worldview, focusing on individuals in practice, developing an organisation's leadership processes, or harnessing deep systemic change, the Dialogue explored the distinctive yet often interconnected questions which each person brought with them.

Key benefits for the diverse participants related to the nature and potential of the self as change agent, the leadership role, the leaderful organisation and/or systemic approaches to improving the environment we operate within.

At the start of the Dialogue those participating chose one, two or three contemporary themes to focus upon. The choices reflected the participants' context and interest. The list of themes which the dialogue considered this year included:

- Given the complexity that is emerging, is there such a thing as leadership as we have understood it?

- To what extent is the world in a macro-shift, representing a substantially new reality, challenging us to change our worldview and how we work within it?

- How does the dynamic between collaboration and competiveness need to change, and what are the implications for the individual, the organisation, particularly in connection to our behaviours, principles and values?

- How do individuals ever begin to navigate the interconnectedness of our changing world as well as the changing 'map' of our world with insight, wisdom and confidence?

- What is the role of the individual and what is the role of the collective?

Reflections on this year include an important paradigm that even progressive leaders struggle with. It is "where" leadership should exist in the organisation. Should it be at the top as in a more traditional hierarchical organisations (including the "uniformed organisation"), should it be shared, should it be inclusive, should it be delegated? How do you avoid abdication? And what kinds of decisions should be made by whom (singular or plural) and when?

And has the "leadership" role changed from being "knowing everything and telling people what to do" (i.e. making decisions based on their own knowledge) to being one of creating the right environment (climate and culture) and enabling the development of people to function most effectively in that environment?

And at a time where collaborative working has implications for today's leaders, what are the implications of finding the bright business partners and developing working relationships based on joint trust?

And once you have decided this then there is the question of how does everyone develop the awareness, behaviours and consciousness to operate in the chosen way? Should there be proactive development of all or some individuals and/or teams or do we assume by having the appropriate systems and working together within them, everyone will collaborate effectively and trust is inherent in the way we work?

What is clear is the need for leaders to establish a climate and culture that frees everyone in the organisation to mobilise and maximise their individual and combined performance. At its best, the leader's responsibility is primarily to provide the right environment and to develop the people in the organisation while still being ready to take an active role in decision-making.

Next year's Dialogue will be held on January 25-26, 2016. If you would like to be considered for invitation please contact wld@tealconsulting.co.uk


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