


CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER



**IDEAS FOR HOLDING DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS WHERE YOU LIVE**

**WE UNITE | HOLD CONVERSATIONS THAT
MATTER. HERE IS A GUIDE TO HOW YOU
CAN BE BRAVE TO HOLD ONE IN YOUR
COMMUNITY TOO.**



THE CONTEXT

**HOW DID WE NOT
SEE THIS COMING?
WHY DID WE NOT
LISTEN TO THOSE
WHO DID? WERE
WE COMMUNICATING
IN BUBBLES?**

In May 2016 52% of the UK population voted to leave the European Union and 48% to stay. This divisive vote tore apart the leadership of the country and left some communities feeling fractured, confused and in fear. Some were elated by the result. Others questioned who their neighbours really were. Out of the shadows of that fear came widespread feelings of isolation and targeted verbal and physical hostility towards people who were perceived to be different.

What this vote showed was an urgent need to listen to the unheard, to understand the needs and different ways of satisfying those across the population. Though it was a simple Yes / No vote, people voted for many different reasons, based on their own experience of a rapidly changing world.

There was then the realisation that both sides of the campaign had lied throughout. It is unclear whether any of the political parties have the necessary

IMHO?

desire or patience to first understand and then tackle the real root causes of the vote to leave the EU.

How did we not see this coming? Why did we not listen to those who did? Were we communicating in bubbles? Did the population have the knowledge, the information they needed to make a fair decision? How did the media affect the polls? Does your neighbour dislike you? Do you trust them?

In the aftermath, a group of Remain voters came together to explore with transparency, openness and a genuine desire to understand how we might build peace and prosperity for all post-Brexit. We asked people who voted leave to join us and together we set out to:

- understand what drove the leave and remain votes
- build bridges between participants
- look at what sort of route map we might develop to help build peace in Britain.

THE INVITATION

HOW MIGHT WE...

HOW MIGHT WE BUILD A SHARED VISION OF PROSPERITY THAT BENEFITS EVERYONE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

'How Might We' questions set out the world as it is and pose a bold provocative question about what WE might DO to improve it.

We use How Might We questions to prompt action going forward. A residual sense after the shock sunk in was, what now? What can I do? Am I brave enough to ask my neighbour how they feel? How we can live well side by side?

This book will show you how you can do the same



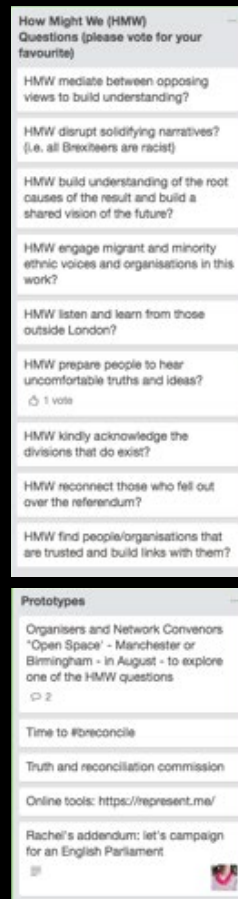


STEP 1 - INVITE PEOPLE TO JOIN YOU

Using an online application (we recommend Trello), invite other networks, colleagues and specialists to contribute how and what they could offer and share. One of the key early steps you might want to consider is to develop a 'Theory of Change'.

This should set out how the world is now and how you want the world to be different.

On these two pages are examples of how We Unite used Trello to set out the problem we wanted to address and some of the How Might We questions we came up with.



STEP 2 - GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

First, members introduce themselves with their name, and what they do. That way, all the members of the Board can see who is part of the group and what their skillbase is. Using the 'cards' within Trello ask the members a series of questions, and start conversations to engage the members with their expertise. Any member can start a conversation or post a question. Use the crowd to contribute to the invitee list to build on the collective wisdom. Keep it diverse and find out key influencers who could do the wider ask on your behalf (to expand your reach).



**NOTHING IN LIFE IS TO
BE FEARED, IT IS ONLY
TO BE UNDERSTOOD.
NOW IS THE TIME TO
UNDERSTAND MORE,
SO WE MAY FEAR LESS**

- Madame Marie Curie

+ BASIC AGREEMENTS

STEP 3 - AGREE PRINCIPLES

The conditions for holding your conversation are critical, without these acknowledged or appreciated, the space you are creating could be threatening and quickly in disarray. It is important to ask the group to suggest principles for an agreed way of working together before you start. That way, they 'own' the contract and will honour it closely. Critically, confidentiality is the responsibility of the participant, who has to decide what they wish to disclose to the group. 'I' statements, be careful not to make assumptions of the group but to take responsibility for your contribution by using 'I', rather than 'we', plural 'you', 'us'.

Here is a table of different types of ground rules or group agreements you can use to start you off courtesy of the work by Conscious Collaboration. Remind your group the importance of listening to one another and adopting one voice at one time. Remember when we interrupt someone it is clear we are not listening, and by default we are asserting our contribution is more valid and important than theirs.



<i>Type of ground rules / group agreement</i>	WHAT THEY ACHIEVE	HOW TO CREATE THEM
CODE OF CONDUCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic agreement about what behaviour is expected • More like 'rules to be followed' • Can be superficial, just about behaviour so that things can work, not about building safety, trust or high quality relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make up your own • Copy and adopt someone else's examples
DIY GROUP AGREEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts to build safety and trust • People feel more ownership due to higher involvement in creating them • More motivation to maintain them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do group activity to create them • Each person answer the question: 'what do I need to feel safe and do my best in this group?' • Note answers on flipchart, use these to create shared agreements
SKILLS FOR CONSCIOUS COLLABORATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a group culture which discourages controlling communication and encourages conscious and collaborative communication • Prevents and helps to resolve conflicts • Make other aspects of group life more healthy and effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to understand these agreements, talk them through in the group, give examples, prototype, practice naming them when they are used • Focus on one per meeting, introduce it and practice only that one in the meeting
ANGA (AS NEEDED GROUP AGREEMENTS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minimum amount of group agreements, and only those proved by the experience to be necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create them in response to issues which arise as needed • Use pre-agreed method for deciding on them
PRINCIPLES OF AN EVOLUTIONARY CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a developmental, evolutionary culture which supports evolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with the above Skills for Conscious Collaboration



We Unite's Principles for Brave Spaces were conceived by the group and can be read here.

1. ALLOW SPACE FOR PEOPLE, INCLUDING YOURSELF TO MAKE MISTAKES

2. REMEMBER THERE ARE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF THE TRUTH

3. ACCEPT THE SENSATION OF DISCOMFORT

4. LEAVE PRECONCEPTIONS AT THE DOOR

5. CONTROVERSY WITH CIVILITY IS A COMMITMENT TO UNDERSTAND SOURCES OF DISAGREEMENT AND WORK TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

6. DO NOT CENSOR EMOTION WITH FACTS OR FACTS WITH EMOTION

7. ALL PARTICIPATION IS BY CHOICE

8. MAKE SURE YOU HEAR WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID AND REPEAT BACK TO THEM TO GROW UNDERSTANDING

IN FULL:

Principles of Brave Spaces guideline for participants

There will be discussions that contain tension and have emotional consequences for participants. It is important to engage with these difficult topics.

These guidelines are to be followed to create an environment of care that allows for difficult topics to be broached.

We would ask that you read these and reflect on them in advance - to ensure that everyone can contribute to the day.

1) FOLLOW YOUR OWN GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF RESPECT:

although the word “respect” might seem an obvious choice, it is important to remember that this means different things to different people, there may or may not be time to discuss how everyone defines the word to find a shared value so instead participants are encouraged to broaden their perspective of the term and do their best to accept differences in approach.

2) FOSTER RISK TAKING:

- a) Allow people to experiment with ideas, allow space for people, including yourself to make mistakes
- b) Allow space for people to change their mind

DO NOT CENSOR EMOTION WITH FACTS AND DO NOT CENSOR FACTS WITH EMOTION.

- c) Remember there are multiple versions of the truth
- d) Accept the sensation of discomfort created outside the comfort zone or changing perspective.

3) LEAVE PRECONCEPTIONS AT THE DOOR:

remember people are all different, so the person you are talking to may not have the same reasons for their vote as others you have heard before.

4) CONTROVERSY WITH CIVILITY

is a commitment to understand sources of disagreement and work cooperatively towards solutions (and replaces the concept of ‘agree to disagree’ which can lead to silencing and oppressing contrasting views).

5) PEACE HAS TO BE BUILT WITH EMOTIONS AND FACTS IN MIND;

do not censor emotion with facts and do not censor facts with emotion.

6) DONT TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY

is often used to encourage self censorship when instead it should mean give space for mistakes from yourself and others and take responsibility for the impact of what we say.



**LISTEN FROM
THE HEART, FOR
WITHOUT HEARTFELT
LISTENING THERE IS
NO COUNCIL.**

7) ALL PARTICIPATION IS BY CHOICE:

respect desired levels and forms of engagement.

8) FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLES OF NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION:

what do you observe, how does it make you feel, what are your needs and what is your request.

9) ACTIVE LISTENING:

make sure you hear what people have said and repeat back to them to make sure you understood correctly, take patience and time to understand.

Here you can also add the first of the four principles from Way of Council, when the above may not be so easy to demonstrate. "Listen from the heart" for without heartfelt listening there is no council. This heartfelt listening is also spoken about as listening to receive, listening without judgement, listening with presence.

To be upfront, there are of course tense areas and these will require extra care around the words we use including racism, dismissive attitudes towards people based on characteristics such as geography and political leaning.



THE BRAVE SPACE

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STEP 3 - FIND AN 'OPEN' VENUE

Find a venue that is impartial, optimistic and easily accessible. Be kind on yourselves, there is a limit to the time you can assign to be in a group in one sitting. Take breaks. Five hours allows for the full wave of bonds to form at the end, to *'form, storm and norm.'*

Resource your group and selves with good hot drinks, water and delicious food. This really helps the warm welcome and stamina of the group. These are challenging conversations that use up energy. It is best to be in your optimal place to deliver an optimal outcome.

**"...THE SUCCESS OF AN
INTERVENTION DEPENDS
ON THE INTERIOR CONDITION OF
THE INTERVENER."**

- Bill O'Brian



**LEARNING NECESSARILY
INVOLVES NOT MERELY
RISK, BUT THE PAIN OF
GIVING UP A FORMER
CONDITION IN FAVOUR
OF A NEW WAY OF
SEEING THINGS”**

- Robert Boostrom



THE PROCESS

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GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

- Invite the participants to sign their name on a flip chart one at a time.
- Invite them to tell the group why they were given that particular name (for example, “My mum danced the Petronella the day I was born”).
- Participants can also be invited to say a little about their surname. It is surprising how many people take an interest in their roots. As the facilitator/trainer, it is helpful to begin the activity by signing in your own name.
- At the end of the sign-in repeat the names on the sheet and pay attention to any special requests from individuals who prefer to be called by their short name (for example, Petronella prefers Petro).

WE USED A FORMAT CALLED OPEN SPACE TO EASILY STRUCTURE THE DIALOGUE FOR THE GROUP AND SEPARATE OUT A VARIETY OF ISSUES THAT PEOPLE WISHED TO SHARE AND ADD THEIR VOICE TO.

Having warmed up and familiarised ourselves with one another, it is now time to tune into the purpose and theme of the day. In the circle, we volunteered why we had come, and how we were feeling about the day ahead.

We used a format called Open Space to easily structure the dialogue for the group and separate out a variety of issues that people wished to share and add their voice to. Chris Corrigan, an Open Space facilitator, has succinct guidelines you can follow online.

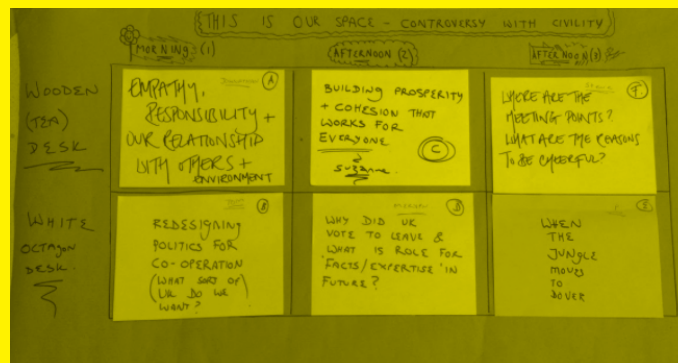
There are four principles to follow:

1. Whoever comes are the right people
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.
3. When it starts is the right time
4. When it's over it's over

Start with laying out the schedule for the day. We split the day into three sessions: one in the morning, and two in the afternoon depending on the schedule you have.

Clearly map where the sessions will be held, ideally in the same room, so people can freely move around the topics (as below).

Ask the whole group to call out themes they wish to discuss to fill these sessions and to post on a board (giant post-it notes help). The person who volunteers an idea then is the host for that session (or can state they would prefer not to). You will see commonalities and connections with other themes, and so the group can post theirs alongside others. The facilitators then group the sessions under common headings and the participants choose which session they will go to.



**IF YOU FIND YOURSELF
IN A SITUATION
WHERE YOU ARE
NOT CONTRIBUTING
OR LEARNING, MOVE
SOMEWHERE WHERE
YOU CAN."**

They have the freedom to vote with their feet and move around the different sessions without judgement. This is the Law of Two Feet:

"If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere where you can."

The host notes key points and the shape of the discussion on paper.

This method not only represents the openness and trusting environment we wish to encourage out of the session. It also allows for co-ownership of the topics and sessions by the participants, so we share responsibility and investment in the outcomes.

To keep the day and atmosphere in the room, open, shared and accepting, have a sheet on the wall where participants can jot down reflections, quotes and 'pain points', areas of discomfort where we can either identify possible

BLANK AGENDA	MORNING	AFTERNOON 1	AFTERNOON 2
SPACE 1			
SPACE 2			



solutions, or simply accept and sit with the discomfort that will ease over time. It helps though to be aware and identify specifically what makes you wince, grimace, feel insecure, so you can be clear what your emotional response is that may be different to your rational response. This also provides an opportunity to share golden nuggets from the smaller groups with the wider group.



CLOSING

The question now is what will YOU do? What is your one promise to the group to take home? And what three things did you learn today? The facilitators take the sheets home and share a presentation that draws down what was written and key points.

KEEPING THE WALLS DOWN

Many of the participants wish to continue the dialogue, and checking in with each other over the weeks that pass after the event, to share stories and to keep the memory of that shared space and experience relevant. The subtler and more profound shifts happen once the participants get home and start to see things a little differently, give more time, pay extra attention, and be careful to question their assumptions. If there is appetite for another meeting, book it in before everyone leaves. You could use Facebook or Streetlife to set up a local group and join our national 'We Unite' Facebook group for ideas.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Chris Corrigan Open Space
Technology Conflict Resolution
Principles of Brave Spaces
Dialogue for Peaceful Change
The Forgiveness Project
Non-violent communication
Art of Hosting
Way of Council
Theory U
Tools for Conscious Collaboration
Theory of Change

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