

CONVENING AUTHORITY: WHEN CAN YOU USE IT?

When have you brought people together with an outcome that was better than you had hoped? We can underestimate people's willingness to respond to our bringing different interests together to identify a shared way forward.

We observe that those who use their convening influence well

- Have built trust with those they seek to bring together
- Are clear about the reasons for the discussions
- Create a context where individuals do not feel threatened or manipulated
- Seek to pace the engagement so that individuals feel heard
- Summarise points made and progress achieved at regular intervals
- Enable difficult issues to be explored in as dispassionate a way as possible
- Ensure that controversial aspects are covered at an appropriate time and are not ignored
- Recognise when a discussion has begun to be counterproductive and needs to be steered or concluded.
- Build support from colleagues where possible in advance about the merits of a discussion and follow up afterwards

It is worth remembering that

- Colleagues may be more receptive than you think to your convening a discussion or suggesting a dialogue. If they are not receptive you will have 'sown a seed' about the need for dialogue
- Clearly communicating in advance why a discussion is needed is key to success
- You do not need to be the chair to be summarising progress and suggesting ways forward
- An initial meeting that does not seem to have made a lot of progress will have set people thinking which often leads to subsequent progress
- The engagement may ideally be face to face, but well-structured virtual engagements are often better than long delays while an issue festers or is unresolved.

When we encourage people to use convening authority they are often pleasantly surprised at the results. We encourage you to think about where you might deploy convening authority to good effect. This prompt is the second of a sequence of four prompts on authority. The next two will cover relationship authority and how you 'show up' as someone with authority.