

nowhere

Creative Dialogue

Thinking together



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A group of approximately 20 people, including men and women in business casual attire, are standing on a stone wall or balcony. They are looking out over a vast, hilly landscape under a clear blue sky. The foreground shows the rough, textured stone wall they are standing on. The background features rolling hills and valleys, suggesting a high-altitude or mountainous region. The lighting is bright, indicating it's daytime.

Thinking together

Most teams get stuck in one mode of operating – sitting around a table, with long agendas and powerpoint presentations, lap-tops open, with people looking up every so often when the topic has something to do with them. They are often unaware that there are different ways of meeting and working, let alone learned to master these different formats and their distinct skills. Instead they apply one way of working and meeting to everything.

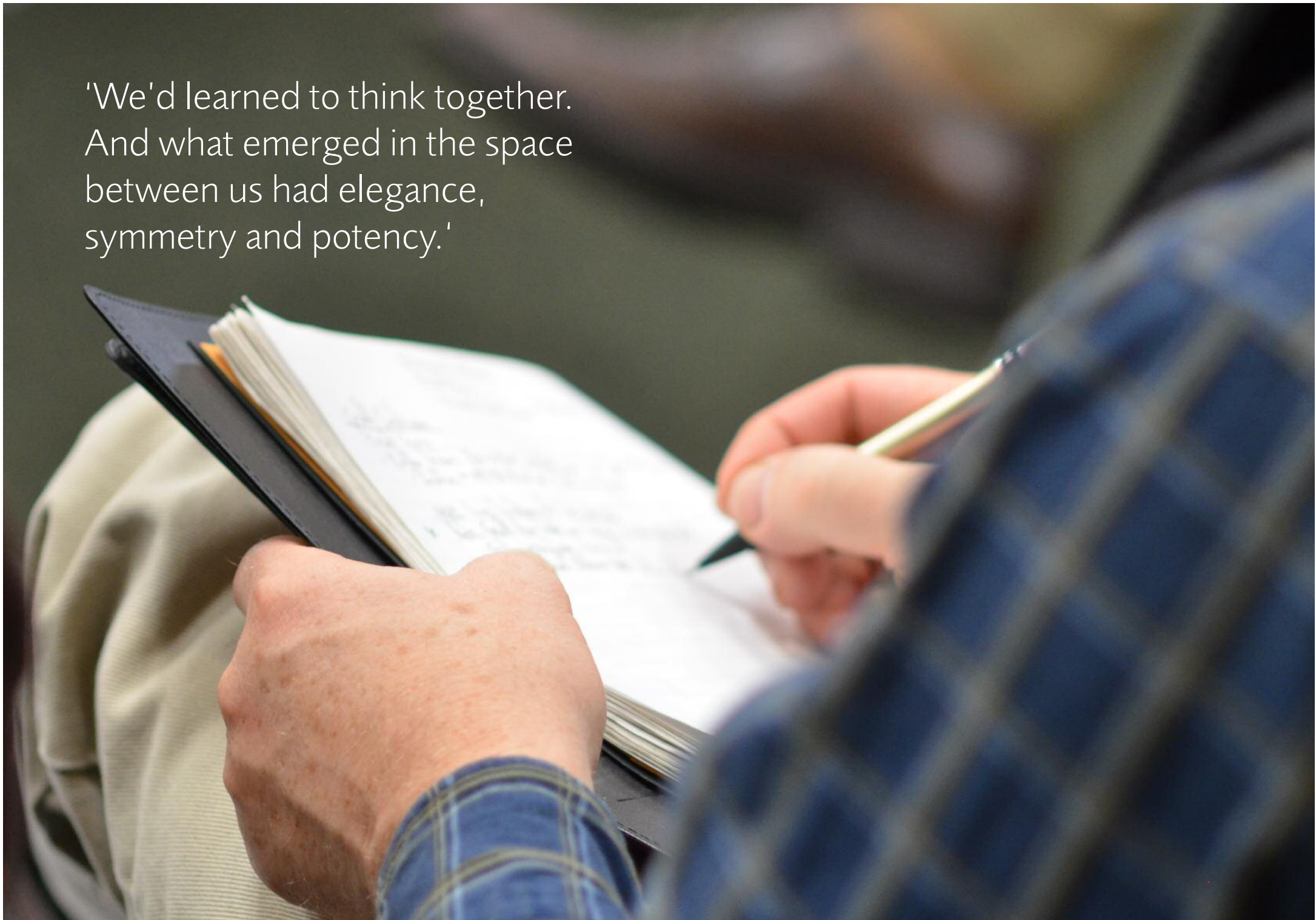
Creative Dialogue is one of the foundational skills for moving beyond the limitations of operational meetings and into more strategic and innovative ways of working.



Applications of Creative Dialogues

- Facing into real, tricky and complex topics that need time to sink into
- Enabling teams to meet their dysfunction and then to be able to move into more productive and creative conversations, often surprising themselves with what they can achieve
- Moving beyond the process-driven dominance of strategic planning to allow new strategic, game-changing patterns to reveal themselves
- Working with questions that take individuals, teams and organisations into the unknown and not-knowing, before collapsing generative flow into creative insight and collective breakthrough

'We'd learned to think together.
And what emerged in the space
between us had elegance,
symmetry and potency.'



An evocative story...

'Having heard about the famous process of Dialogue, and how it had been used to share learning and make-meaning of what had happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis, twenty years after the event, by the American, Russian and Cuban leaders that were actually involved; I couldn't wait to experience it for myself, albeit with a small group of people on a training programme learning about the creative power of dialogue. In fact we were just about to dive into a three-day dialogue.

We began, as you would expect, sitting in a circle, sharing thoughts and ideas. At many points it was very stimulating and we all felt we had got off to a good start. However, by late morning we started to run out of steam. As we worked through the afternoon it became very difficult to maintain energy and focus. In fact, quite a few of us wanted to break out of the dialogue and apply some of the other creative skills we had learned on the course to the topic at hand. We were told in no uncertain terms that we were going to stay with the process. So we stayed with it. Of course some of us started to get even more irritable and blame the process and/or the facilitators. Interestingly, our anger fuelled us to get through the rest of the day.

The next day we came back to the dialogue and were challenged to start where we left off. Very quickly we fell back into politeness and back into our heads. However, quicker than the previous day, we also moved back into our black cloud of despair, and the tension rose. We stayed with this tension for a few hours. Then something really interesting happened. One person in the room, with tears in their eyes, just named what was happening for them in that moment, and took responsibility for their own reactions and emotions. This was followed by a lucidity of thought that took us all by surprise. Then, another person, affected by this different quality of contribution, was also moved to speak. And, as they spoke, new parts of the puzzle came into our collective awareness. Then, like a domino effect, we started to find and follow each other's flow. It was weird, and it was amazing. And it lasted for many hours. We'd learned to think together. And what emerged in the space between us had elegance, symmetry and potency.

I have often been resourced by that experience to help me, and help teams, stay with it, to move through the different stages of creative dialogue, and to not prematurely collapse conversations because we were stuck, lost, frustrated or fearful. In fact I have now superseded my intense introduction to dialogue on several occasions, each time generating insights and breakthroughs that have profoundly affected the business-wide choices we needed to make.'

What are Creative Dialogues?

Creative Dialogue moves teams and groups beyond politeness and shared monologues into and through different stages of conversation, including: the unskillful and volatile breakdown stage; the reflective and reflexive stage, where individual veils and collective assumptions are held up to the light; through to the generative stage, with its characteristics of insight, pattern, flow and breakthrough.

Alongside these stages comes a set of skills and principles. The more we master these skills and embody these principles in action, the quicker and deeper we can dive into the unknown and start to truly think together. This is often in contrast to the usual ping-pong of opinion and assumption that can dominate meetings and conversations, trapping us in circular conversations that can take up so much time and energy.

However, Creative Dialogue is not really a tool or technique for people to put in their back-pack for future use. Rather it is a skill that can only be developed over time, and with practice. As we learn more about the nature and rhythm of each of the stages, we can also learn to move into generative flow more often and for longer periods of time. Yet you always have to earn the right to step into flow!

To learn more about *Creative Dialogue* email us at catalysts@nowhere.com

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