



## Co-creative conferences

by a global head of HR

We have over the past four years engaged in a series of co-creative interventions with the company leadership and it is now an accustomed way of working. Our conferences have been pivotal moments in shifting the company leadership towards a more innovative culture.

There have been two main types of conference. The first type was more structured, building on self-awareness, personal presence and shared experience. The second type built upon this foundation and moved into less structured, self-managed interventions.

### **Phase 1: A conference with a difference**

We first introduced co-creative working at the company's Global Leadership Conference of around 200 senior leaders. The impact on the delegates was immediate. We moved from the usual 'show and tell' format to one where we invited delegates to trust a process of self-discovery and individual networking to unlock creativity. We sat delegates in small 'home groups' of eight to ten people, equipping them with the disciplines and micro-skills to encourage openness and exchange on the conference topics at a personal level. This experience highly energized the group, as individuals felt valued in a way they had not experienced before. The new conference approach was coupled with the launch of the company purpose and values. Delegates were therefore not only experiencing personal development but also the feeling of being part of a new era in the company's development.

### **Phase 2: Self-managed co-creative experiences**

Having established the backdrop of self-awareness, presence and skilful dialogue, we moved the group two years later into a more self-managed working environment. This concept necessitates individual delegates volunteering topics for discussion in front of the whole community in a market-place format driven by their passions, needs and interests. It takes courage for individuals to do this when they have no idea what the response will be, but the community took to the concept immediately. Realizing that it was mature enough to shape its own agenda galvanized the group even further. People were working on the topics they wanted to talk about in small groups in an almost effortless and ad hoc way. A conference report captured our creative dialogues so we could take our insights back into the organization. We had learned a new and accelerated way of working.

One of the most important factors in this co-creative journey has been that it has been leader led right from the very beginning. A colleague and I hosted the first conference and a federal team of about 20 senior leaders played important roles in facilitating the conference design. Senior leaders stepping outside their personal comfort zones and teaching new ways of working demonstrated a new level of commitment that others felt compelled to follow. It has been very impressive how leaders right across the company have since stepped up to be involved in leading such interventions, fuelled by their own experience and the confidence to try out the techniques locally in different cultures all over the world.

