

## TRAFFIC LIGHT APPROACH TO SORTING WHICH ISSUE TO FOCUS ON

**PURPOSE:** To ensure everyone in the conversation is considered and included in the decision about what gets focused on first.

**CONTEXT:** If a group doesn't reach agreement on what to focus on, it won't be able to deepen the work. What will likely happen is that just when the group arrives at a place of resolution, someone in a marginal role whose issue didn't get a green light will throw 'a bomb' by bringing in something disturbing. By spending time getting agreement at the outset, and giving appreciation to those whose ideas are temporarily halted (red light) we ultimately get deeper focus as a group.

**WHAT YOU WILL NEED:** Something to write on that everyone can see (butchers paper or whiteboard & markers)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- The Leader/Facilitator can start by asking the group what it would like to focus on, write these on a white board and then sort out the important issues by **noticing which items elicit strong responses (not just verbally – also atmospheres, silence-drops etc)**.
- A 'traffic light' analogy can be used to help decide what issue to focus on. A strong energetic response from the group is a 'yes' or **green light** as indicated by heightened energy. The leadership practitioner frames this as a request for something else to temporarily wait (**red light**) whilst the most energetic issue is worked through. Going with the issue that has the highest level of group interest and energy is usually the most productive route.
- The people whose issues don't get the focus at this time need to be thanked and reassured that their issue won't be forgotten. This is most easily done through appreciation. We are all better able to wait when we feel valued and less likely to interrupt or sabotage when we've been acknowledged.
- Sorting does not only support the majority experience. Agreement reached through negotiating 'traffic lights' is usually **not a complete agreement but a flow**. It's about the neutral representation of multiple voices competing for centrality until the group can identify its priorities. Balancing neutral statements are needed from the leadership practitioner to counter polarisations that emerge whilst building agreement.