Non-Profits and the Thinking Environment ®

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This is a handbook designed to explore and illustrate the most successful ways to work with each other and produce great results within the sector. Everything we examine here has impact on how to communicate, how to run meetings, how to involve people in non-profits and of course how to fundraise.

We're starting on the basis that all meetings can be improved. Whether it's two people meeting to discuss a possible contribution, ten people meeting as the Board of a charity, or a hundred people meeting in support of a new initiative there are ways of being together that support the clearest thinking and the best results.

One of these ways is by asking fresh, focused questions. The human mind works best in the presence of a question, and the best questions help us to think brilliantly.

This one brings our attention to the differences between non-profits and all other sectors.

'What are the values that drive non-profits and why do they matter?'

The Non-Profits Sector

is based on values like trust, social justice and honesty.[1] People choose to work in the sector because they identify closely with these and because Non-profits hold these values explicitly. As a professional sector it must raise funds efficiently and cover its own costs – but it is free of the demands of raising dividends and answering to shareholders.

To raise money efficiently the sector needs to be professional. To answer to the demands of the values it incorporates it needs to recognise and then respond to the differences between its values and the commercial sector's. Why? Because it can, because it will function better and because in doing so it is modelling a system of great potential benefit to all organisations.

New Commercial Structure: what would it look like?

If we set out to invent a new corporate/ financial structure in which embedded values of trust, justice and equality drive the objectives then the non-profits sector is our closest existing model. These and other core values are well-established within the sector, which is also flatter in its structure and more egalitarian than the commercial sector.

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[1] Voluntary Sector Working Paper *Ties that Bind? An empirical exploration of values in the voluntary sector: value importance, hierarchy and consensus in independent hospices in the UK* by Peter R. Elson. Number 2 April 2006

Of course we all recognise that most charities of any size employ salaried staff and in many cases use growth models and strategies from the corporate sector. Yet unlike these, non-profit organisations tap into a vast reserve of unpaid work via volunteers, an arrangement that minimises hierarchy and changes so much within the model. Amongst other things this handbook is questioning the received wisdom of assuming that the commercial systems are the best way for non-profits to do business.

With so much goodwill and equality in the frame isn't it odd that non-profits tend to use the same structures for meetings, the same mechanisms for doing business and creating funds as the commercial sector?

Commercial Sector:

In the commercial sector the focus on baseline profit effects every interaction. Meetings are the places where the decisions that generate profit are made: they are often competitive, urgent, demanding, with important matters decided at speed. This way of running meetings is generally consistent with the culture of profit: it reflects its values. Even though many corporate companies will claim core values/ mission statements that sound similar to non-profits' values, the difference between them becomes evident when the bottom line is under stress, and decisions made that must ignore the human cost in favour of commercial gain.

Until recently the commercial sector believed that its models were the successful ones so non-profits followed suit on the basis that they would benefit if they imitated this way of working. This is illogical. It denies the difference between the sectors.

As scientist Lewis Thomas writes: '*Debating is what committees really do, not thinking. Take away the need for winning points, leading the discussion, protecting one's face, gaining applause, shouting down opposition, scaring opponents, all that kind of activity – and a group of bright people can get down to quiet thought.'*[2]

'So if we knew that there is a better way to create professional interactions that are fully consistent with non-profits' values, what do we think it would look like?'

As it happens there *is* a process of human behaviours that recognises and embraces these values. One that recognises that meetings, presentations, performance reviews, strategic planning, conflict resolution and decision making of all sorts can take place in an environment that celebrates humanity and encourages its potential brilliance. A process that recognises how doing so creates clearer thinking. How adopting these behaviours can take non-profits to new levels of success in all areas of development.

[2] *The Medusa and the Snail, More notes of a Biology Watcher*, Lewis Thomas, Bantam, 1980

This is the Thinking Environment, a sustainable, practical and entirely successful system for human growth and understanding developed by Nancy Kline and Time to Think. [3]

The Thinking Environment © and Non Profit – How do they fit together?

The Thinking Environment recognises explicitly that the quality of everything we do depends on the quality of the thinking we do first. That the key factor in the quality of a person's thinking is *the way they are being treated by the people who are with them while they are thinking*. In order for people to think really well for themselves the people around them need to behave in certain ways, and the Thinking Environment has identified and articulated those ways.

These are the ten components of the Thinking Environment. Introducing even a few of these components into groups and meetings will have huge effect. Arranging all interactions as Thinking Environments is transformational.

TRANSFORMING MEETINGS INTO THINKING ENVIRONMENTS

What does a meeting in your own organisation look like, and what would it change if you were to introduce the components of Attention, Ease and Equality into your regular meetings?

Let's look at a typical scenario in a small charity and how it works.

This charity is called Footprints. It supports neo-natal research at a major teaching hospital. The results of the research have direct effect on the birth of healthy babies, and the goal of the charity is to find enough money each year to fund new types of research, which are then taken up and developed by one of the major pharmaceutical companies.
Some of their original findings have been developed worldwide.

Their objective each year is to raise £200,000 – a substantial sum. The Chairman of Footprints is the consultant surgeon who leads the unit, and the eight Trustees are other medics, a lawyer and several grateful parents who feel that having benefited so much from Footprints' research they want to support its further development. They include a designer and a media consultant.

Meetings are irregular: the Trustees meet three times a year at the hospital, and the seven people on the Development committee who do most of the fundraising work meet frequently, mainly in each other's houses.

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[3] www.timetothink.com

PLACE

Trustee meetings take place in a hospital consulting room. Extra chairs are brought in from the corridor. There is one full time Footprints employee, its Director, and a part-time Administrator who has prepared the paperwork and distributes it now. Scheduled for 6.30-8.00, typically a Trustee meeting will begin late because the Chairman is finishing medical duties nearby.

The Agenda is long. There is a list of nine points for consideration. These include the following year's budget for new research projects, an update on the research beneficiaries and a list of upcoming fundraising events.

EXPECTATIONS

- The other Trustees discuss some of this informally before the Chairman arrives and are largely interested in the research details.
- The staff hope to move fast through the research topics and get onto PR and events for decision making
- The Development committee representatives are already impatient of the delay because they must have decisions in order to plan.

CHAIRING THE MEETING

When he does arrive the Chairman sits down at the top of the table, greets everyone generally, pulls the Agenda towards him and says 'Right, what's going on here, what's first on the list – ah, 2010 Budget.' He looks around the table. 'Who's got anything to say about this?' Everyone looks blank. 'OK, then I'll start'.

Ten minutes later the Chairman stops speaking generally about progress, looks around and asks 'What does anyone think about that?' One of the medics asks him something specific about one of the research topics. Another chips in with a clarification. They all talk about this specific research.

At the end of the table the Development Committee members look at each other, and at their watches. The Director asks if they can all decide on the budget allocation now, please?

After another ten minutes on research with various new possibilities in the air, the Chairman says 'Ok, good, we can work on that. What's next?' Since most of the Budget is going to be spent on one or other of the projects currently to hand, and the majority of the Trustees are interested in the medical aspects of that, almost an hour is spent on this part of the Agenda. Some useful if not entirely relevant points are made, and the media consultant picks up some possible hooks for stories. Which she describes in some detail.

With half an hour left to run, the Committee members are feeling anxious about getting to the detail that must be decided upon. They need to sign off dates and venues, and also want to be certain of attendance. The Director shares their anxiety. She says 'Mr Chairman – can I suggest that we move to item no 8 now, we really do need some decisions from you all?'

'Oh yes, of course Alison – good idea. Tell us what you're planning.' Alison starts to describe the first event, a blacktie dinner for 200 the following autumn. They agree to her suggested date and express surprise at the ticket price of £170 per head. There is some discussion about who will take tables, who will speak and how to get some good auction prizes.

One of the Trustees, a keen rugby player, offers to try to get tickets for an international game. Some sporting discussion follows – ended by the Director, who calls for attention and announces the second event, a race night for 100 to be held just before the Gold Cup. The Trustees agree to this, and she moves quickly on to the third event, a tea party to celebrate Footprints 10th birthday, to which they will invite all the parents and babies connected to the unit.

It's now 7.45. There are four other events to discuss, the budget details aren't explicitly decided, and there is other business to consider. One of the Trustees interrupts the ongoing new Events description and says 'Excuse me everyone, I think we need to get back to the main Agenda – I'd like to talk about Pfizer'. The committee member sits back, disappointed and a little offended. The Chairman needs to leave. He looks at the committee members and the Director and then at his watch and says 'That all sounds great, I'm sure you'll be able to sort out the detail…?'

'Right. Pfizer. What's happening?' What's happening is potential funding for the newest bit of research, and quite a lot of inside track. At 8.15 the Chairman suddenly calls a halt. Looks down, sees the previous Minutes, waves them at the group and says 'These look ok, any changes? fine' and signs them. 'Date for next meeting? April 10th? Very good.'

To general nodding and agreement around the table he shuffles together the various papers he brought with him and packs up. The other Trustees do likewise. The Director grabs him as he goes out the door and they agree a time to call to follow up on the detail. The Development committee members make a list of the decisions they still need. All leave, many with a sense of not having achieved their aims.

What kind of meeting was this? Was it executive? Was it generative? Was it useful? Was it the best use of the time? Was it finished? Was it familiar?

Of course the scenario varies from one non-profits scenario to another. Trustee meetings can happen in boardrooms, hotels and basements. Committee meetings happen in kitchens, cafes and carparks. For obvious reasons most non-profits don't create expensive purpose-built surroundings although there's no reason not to make use of them when available and useful. And there's absolutely no reason why non-profits shouldn't have the best possible meetings. How can we ensure that this happens?

Q. How would we use the TE components to make this meeting generative, to ensure that each member of the group is heard, to ignite new thinking and to meet the needs of every participant so there is no unfinished business?

ALTERNATIVE *FOOTPRINTS* MEETING

PLACE:

The Chairman and Trustees between them have chosen the best available meeting space. (This could be in a house, in the hospital or in one or other of their offices). In our example, it's a Trustee's dining room, with the right number of chairs so no-one is left scrabbling for seats; it's light, quiet and welcoming. When the committee members arrive the regular attendees offer glasses of water and introductions. The Chairman knows he must arrive on time, and does so.

CHAIRING THE MEETING

The Chairman chooses to sit halfway down the table. He looks at the group and greets them generally. He says 'I'd like to start by hearing from everyone about what's been going well for you since we last met. Who'll start – and we'll go to the left from there?'

After a pause one of the Trustees says 'Well as it happens – on my way here I met Kate Drummond, and she confirmed that she'd like to join us – which is good news, because of her track record with government health funding.'

Sitting to his left, the next Trustee looks up and says 'Well what's gone well for me is that I got a hole in one in the competition last Saturday!' Everyone laughs, and the committee member on his left smiles and says 'Where were you playing? Not at Mount Stewart? They've just agreed to give us a prize for the Winter Ball…

What's happening here? What's happening is that in this opening Round each participant joins the meeting as they speak – because <u>we don't arrive properly in a meeting until we speak.</u>
In speaking of something that's gone well we are introducing positive possibilities into the room.
And in speaking in a Round, without hierarchy, we are creating ease.

Which means that as people become accustomed to this new way of being in meetings they will think more freely, be more generative, make connections with each other and with ideas. We think better about the negative factors in our work if we first put our minds to what is going well. We think more generatively when we don't interrupt each other, and we agree to that before we start. Our Attention is respectful. We don't judge what is said, or laugh at it, or discuss it.

When the Round is completed and everyone including the Chairman has spoken he will then present the first Agenda topic clearly. Instead of vaguely asking 'where shall we start?' he will ask the first Agenda question.

Everything on the Agenda is in the form of a question.

Why? Because the human mind works best in the presence of a question. Because at the heart of any topic is a question and when you ask that question it focuses the minds in the room and gets answers faster.

So the first item is not 'Budget for 2010'.
The first item is 'How will we make the best use of our resources for 2010?'

Again the Chairman asks for someone to start the Round. He reminds everyone not to interrupt the speakers and reminds the speakers to be succinct. He promises to have discussion afterwards.

Without any comment from him or anyone else we listen to the first speaker until finished, move to the person on the right (or left) and proceed in turn around the group as before.

Each person offers their ideas on the best ways to spend the 2010 resources – if ideas duplicate there is no need to repeat them, and the ideas tend to develop as the speakers go round the table. Agreement on key points becomes evident. In this case, the key 'spend' emerges as funding for a new midwife care study.

When one of the Trustees interrupts the speaker the Chairman suggests he waits until his turn. Why? Because those who interrupt the speaker also ambush the discussion and do violence to the idea not yet expressed. They are not necessarily the people with the *best* ideas – only the fastest.

NB: Sometimes the quiet people have the best ideas.
This is how you get to hear them.

If the group is larger than eight, split it into two smaller groups so that the Rounds happen in less time and everyone still gets to speak.

Then the Chairman draws the group together round the table, and asks for a Round to summarise what has been discussed. There is Open Discussion about the detail of the midwife care survey.

Then he summarises clearly what has been decided and checks that that's correct.

Move on to the next item. Ask the question. Start a Round, or Thinking Groups. Regroup, summarise, decide.

Move through all the Agenda questions in this way. Sometimes people won't want to speak – that's fine too. The point is that they have the chance to do it.

At the end of the Agenda items the Chairman will summarise the decisions that have been made. In a final Round, he asks each person to comment succinctly on what they feel has been achieved, and on what has gone well.

What is happening here? Attention. Equality. Ease. The participants have agreed to be good listeners, to pay careful attention as others speak, not to interrupt their ideas and to allow the thinkers to finish.
Everyone knows they will have a turn, so they can listen with attention.
Everyone is equal as a Thinker.

What is not happening here?. Status. Interventions. Interruptions. Powerplay. Timewasting. Competitive thinking. Showing off.
Does any of this ring bells?

Q.

What would happen in your non-profits meeting if you started to use some or all of the components of the Thinking Environment?

This handbook will now go on to identify and then explore the ways in which the voluntary/ non-profits sector already embodies some of the components of the TE.

It will discuss the ten components in greater detail and then offer ways of recognising and using them to transform meetings, encourage creative dialogue and build business relationships in ways entirely appropriate to the specific qualities of the non-profits sector.

We want to see how all parts of the sector can be enriched by a heightened awareness of the TE components and to inspire everyone working in non-profits to introduce thinking environment principles into every aspect of their work.

Why? Because doing so will create a truly integrated sector where values are both stated and lived. Because doing so will increase benefits in all areas of communication, including fundraising. Above all, because it works.

THE TEN COMPONENTS OF THE THINKING ENVIRONMENT

What each means in the Non-Profits sector and what each means in the Thinking Environment

1. ATTENTION

What do we mean by *Attention* in Non-profits?

Within the sector we are paying attention to identifying specific areas of need, and looking at ways of answering those needs. We are also giving attention to individuals, to special interest groups, to communities. If we don't pay attention in this way the most vulnerable members of our society will continue to suffer from the problems of inequality that the sector addresses.

Example: Three years or so ago the Ireland Fund of Great Britain became aware of the specific needs of the elderly and vulnerable Irish in the UK. By examining and paying a very particular attention to the long and sometimes problematic socio-economic relationship between Ireland and the UK that is at the root of the problem the IFGB created an answer, the very successful ***Forgotten Irish*** *Campaign.*

In Thinking Environment terms

Attention means listening to each other

- with palpable respect and interest
- and without interruption.

It means <u>not interrupting</u> when another person is speaking, not stopping their idea in mid flow, not running the risk of losing a terrifically useful idea because we didn't wait to hear it out. And knowing that this level of Attention is in the room people will start truly to think for themselves.

How often does that happen in your life, in business or otherwise?
How often do you get to finish the thought that you began so well in a meeting – or get to hear to the end of someone else's thought?
What great ideas and cost-saving solutions are we losing when we interrupt each other midway?

2. EQUALITY

In Non-profits:

Given that the non-profits sector exists to address the inequalities of disadvantage we'll assume that volunteers and others employed within the sector want to do something about it. What they do varies in scope, what drives them is a commitment to equalising difference in some way.

Example: A Red Cross Trustee putting in a day per month on committees is imbued with the same sense of fairness as a volunteer shaking a tin on the street, or a student doing a stint of VSO. All want to correct an imbalance in the world and therefore create a new equality.

At the same time, the fact that no volunteer is being paid divests the work of the usual hierarchies/ company reward system and promotes that sense of equality. Another reason that individuals frequently mention is that as volunteers they enjoy a sense of equality with their peers.

In Thinking Environment terms

Equality recognises that even in a hierarchy people are equal as thinkers; what this means in practise is that in any meeting the people participating

- will treat each other as thinking peers,
- will offer each other equal time to speak and
- will observe agreed boundaries.

These three simple-seeming elements can be a real challenge for people hardened by years of standard competitive business practise. For obvious reasons it's almost always the more senior people who find these ideas hard to accept, yet when used in meetings they have a profound effect on thinking, producing a clarity and depth of thought that will *save* time and prove extremely effective.

3. EASE

Working in a voluntary capacity in Non-profits

feels quite different to working for a salary. The volunteer is autonomous and has power, as any Oxfam shop manager will tell you: while the manager is salaried and therefore answerable, the volunteer is there purely on their own terms and so can reduce or withdraw their support and input according to their own agenda. Volunteers can't be sacked if they weren't employed in the first place. They can only be politely asked to leave. That knowledge creates ease in the mind of the volunteer.

Ease in the TE has a relationship to this, and is also different.
Ease means

- listening without urgency
- offering the person who is thinking freedom from that internal rush that blocks good ideas, clear thoughts.

It means sitting back calmly and listening – up to and including the silences.

4. APPRECIATION

Within Non-profits

Appreciation has a daily role. A big role. Appreciation is both the fertiliser and the flower, the reason why so many people will go out of their way to start doing something for nothing – and go on doing it. And it's fairly standard practise that those people are appreciated in small acts of thanks and in occasional bigger acts of recognition and reward.

Whether at a Christmas lunch, at a Trustee meeting, at a public event where specific people can be recognised and thanked by beneficiaries – appreciation is a kind of gold standard. Another robust assumption suggests that many volunteers take up their roles because they expect, enjoy and ultimately benefit from the appreciation that results.

Example: at a Lunch club for elderly Irish people in North London the unpaid organiser is a remarkable woman in her 80's. She is very clear about why she does the work (which is considerable). 'I know that people need me, they really appreciate what I do, I need them too and it keeps us all going. I wouldn't stop for the world.'

Within TE:

What Alice knows and neurobiology[4] now proves is that we all think and work best with regular appreciation. When we offer genuine appreciation of a person's qualities, in a vital ratio of 5:1, we are actively inviting the brain to produce the clearest, most compelling thinking of which it is capable.

Why would we not want to do that whenever and wherever we can?

5. ENCOURAGEMENT

In Non- Profit

Creating capacity for improvement in health, personal circumstances, disease prevention and better facilities and then delivering it is a hugely encouraging intervention that tells individuals that they matter. That's what charities do. Ideally that same spirit is ingrained inside the charity delivering the service. That will depend on how it does business.

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[4] Nelson*: The Power of Appreciation, Mindlab Publishing 2006 and Kindred Spirit, 2007*. Drs. Noelle Nelson, Daniel Amen and Jeannine Lemare Calaba Using a neuro-imagine technique called the SPECT scan, the doctors studied how appreciative thoughts and feelings affected blood flow to the brain. They found that less blood flows to the brain, particularly to the cerebellum, cingulated gyrus and the left basal ganglia when we are thinking critical thoughts. It flows to those areas better when we are thinking appreciative thoughts.

Obviously business is by definition competitive: markets, prices, goods and services are all geared to beat off competition via margins and profits and therefore to win, to earn the most, pay the highest dividends. The behaviours that derive from competition are not the behaviours that support genuine encouragement.

Encouragement in TE terms

is a state that moves beyond internal competition to support thinking and action at the cutting edge. It's not jealous of the potential success of another: it supports that potential by letting go of the instinct that dictates that an individual's personal level of success (in a discussion, in a meeting, in training, in any context) must come before anyone's else's success.

What looks like a contradiction is surprisingly effective. Letting go of the instinct to be first allows an ease to spring up that improves every aspect of thinking.

6. FEELINGS

In Non-Profits

feelings have a significant place. Not always and every day, yet everyone who works in the sector has experiences that move them. Tears are allowed when the new ward in the Hospice opens, or the dedicated lift gives disabled people access to the lunch club, or the new water pump fills the first bucket with clean water. Laughter and tears tend to crop up in any number of contexts and are part of the fabric of the work.

It's a really powerful example of the difference we are discussing here: tears and emotion are the pariahs of the commercial sector, seen as weakness and demeaning in most cases. Why? Emotional release is intelligent behaviour: those strenuous efforts to stop or control emotions also block clear thinking.

The TE acknowledges that

the expression of feelings allows this real block to thinking well first to exist and then to pass. Not just tears: anger is also a tremendous block to clarity, so TE experience suggests that

- Listening through anger makes way for thorough thinking
- Crying first and thinking afterwards is smart
- After laughter we think better.

7. INFORMATION

What happens if someone knows something important about the markets/ new laws/ the price of copper, and then sits in a room with others without that information so he is able to use it to his own advantage? In a word, business.

To have information that might effect outcomes and not to use it to general advantage is not untypical behaviour in the corporate sector. It helps to make a profit. It also helps to create confusion, uncertainty, lack of trust.

In Non-Profits

that behaviour doesn't really make sense. And it would be truly sad to see it happening there.

In TE terms, Information

means supplying the facts and dismantling denial so that a thinker can think fully and clearly. This means that

- Withholding or denying information is acknowledged to result in intellectual vandalism

- Facing what you have been denying leads to better thinking.

8. DIVERSITY

Who belongs in Non profit?

Oxfam, Actionaid, Christian Aid? Red Cross, Red Crescent, Medicine Sans Frontieres? Animal Rescue, Cats Protection? Alzheimers Trust, Cancer Relief, Heart Foundation?. It's us and you and we and them, it's Roumanian orphans and Irish travellers, Malian orphans and Asian child workers; it's probably easier to say who it isn't than who it is. It's certainly diverse.

Reality is diverse. Organisations that welcome diversity welcome divergent thinking and diverse group identities. How many commercial organisations are truly diverse in this way – and how many non-profits? We could certainly make a reasonable case for a fairly large gap…

The TE principle

of Diversity suggests that

- The mind works best in the presence of reality
- Reality is diverse
- Homogeneity is a thinking inhibitor

Is it an exaggeration to ask whether Non-profits already reflect the reality of human diversity in ways inconceivable within the corporate sector?

9. INCISIVE QUESTIONS TM

These are questions that remove assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves clearly and creatively.

10. PLACE

Our physical environment impacts on how we think. At a major homeless project the organisation planning its development discussed with the architects how they wanted to create a building that said to those who used it . *'Coming here is not an act of desperation, it is a new beginning. You are human and you matter. Be comfortable.'*

The completed building is beautiful. Flexible, colourful spaces that adapt to many purposes, the communities who live near it celebrate what it is doing, even though many of its clients are people often perceived as threatening. It is a place that says 'you matter'.

How many boardrooms say that? How many places of business inspire warmth and trust, a sense of purpose and community, the energy to think well and positively? By their nature Non-profits don't design and occupy important meeting spaces and glamorous boardrooms, nor should they, since doing so takes them out of the reality of their mission into an environment that so often lacks one.

And the TE view of Place?

Always to think about it. Be sure to create a physical environment that says back to people 'You matter'. Why? Because

- When the physical environment affirms your importance you think more boldly
- When your body is cared for and respected, your thinking improves.

These are the ten components of the Thinking Environment.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THE TEN COMPONENTS?

In this Introduction we've had a look at all ten of the TE components and thought about where and how they already appear in the Non-Profits sector.

We've done that at some length because each one is significant: the ideal is to introduce all of them. Yet the extraordinary thing is that introducing even one or two of these components will make a difference to meetings, to working with volunteers or paid staff, and to business practice.

And to help the Non-profits sector in this, Time to Think has provided the logical follow-up to this introduction of the components. This is the next part of this handbook, a

Time to Think guide to Transforming Meetings.

In the following section we offer three applications that can be used to transform any meeting into a Thinking Environment.

A. Thinking Pairs

(or, How to use 10 minutes so that everyone in the room is thinking well)

In the example of the Footprints Trustee meeting the group split into two to discuss the Agenda questions. The Chairman could also have chosen to address the questions by splitting the groups into pairs of thinkers, each person to have 5 minutes to think and 5 minutes to speak about each question in turn.

We do this because attention from one person generates thinking from another person.

Until everyone becomes used to this new way of being in a meeting the Chairman will find it useful to remind everyone of the key factors for thinking pairs.

Essentially these are
- that each Thinker will have 5 minutes of uninterrupted thinking time, during which the partner will not interrupt.
- Ideally the partner will maintain eye contact – the Thinker may turn away, the partner may not.
- This tells the Thinker that they are being listened to, that their thinking is important – and generates new thinking.

In practice:
To be interrupted is <u>not good</u>
To get lucky and not be interrupted is better
To *know* you will not be interrupted allows you truly to think for yourself

Transformative listening

comes from your fascination with where the person will go next in their thinking. It comes from the powerful message that you are giving to the thinker with your silence – that their intelligence is enough.

Even if you think you know what they are going to say next, please don't say it. What matters is not what is said, what matters is what happens for that person *while they are saying it*. You can't know where the thinking is going to go next – so try not to interrupt it.

The format of a Thinking Pair:

The first thinking partner asks the first Thinker 'what do you want to think about, and what are your thoughts?' Because of the Agenda question, this could be altered to include 'what are your thoughts about the key spend for 2010?'

The Thinker may speak at once, or pause to think. Wait. Don't speak again. Just maintain eye contact, sit back, be comfortable with the silence.

- When the Thinker does speak, listen.
- When they stop speaking, keep listening.

Stopping speaking does not mean we have stopped thinking. Speaking at that moment might interrupt the most brilliant and interesting new thought. So please don't. Your turn to speak will come later.

What more?

If the thinking does stop, the Thinker will say so – using a phrase like ' that's all,' or 'I'm done'. So then the partner asks 'What more do you think?' And thinking will probably start up again. New thinking.

After 5 minutes, timed by the Chairman or whoever is facilitating the meeting the Thinker finishes, and thanks the partner.

They change roles.

The new partner asks the Thinker 'What do you want to think about, and what are your thoughts (about the key spend for 2010)?' The Thinker then thinks and speaks for 5 minutes of uninterrupted time.

At the end, both Thinkers can thank each other and appreciate a quality that they have noticed. 'I appreciate your energy – thank you.'

Why? Because appreciation causes us to think better.[5]

These Thinking Pairs can be of 3, 5, 10 minutes each way, the length of time depends completely on the subject matter, the number of Agenda items and the total time available.

B. Rounds

If you only do one thing to improve the thinking in groups, institute Rounds.

[5] eg: Research work at the HeartMath Research Centre in California. (article: *the Appreciative Heart: the Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*.) This work documents the effects of appreciation on the regulation of heart beat variability and pattern and the stimulation of the cortex.

Regardless of power differentials and hierarchies, in TE meetings everyone's thinking matters because getting everyone's thinking produces best results.

The best way to get the best thinking from everyone is to set up the meeting to incorporate systematic uninterrupted Rounds.

Why? Because

- Everyone matters
- Rounds increase the generative nature of the group's thinking.
- Rounds also usually produce superior thinking in less time

A Round is a simple enough concept that requires 5 separate actions from the Chair.

- Decide first what the question is that people will be addressing in the Round
- Determine the direction of the Round (to the left from the first speaker, or to the right)
- Ask for a volunteer to begin the Round and to be the first speaker
- remind people to keep their eyes on the eyes of the person speaking
- Remind people that no-one speaks again until the Round is completed.

Of course what is less simple is keeping to this format throughout the meeting. Practice will help greatly, as will a promise from all participants to do their best to remember these new behaviours.
For some, it will come naturally.

C. Open Discussion

Once again we agree not to interrupt whoever is speaking during Open Discussion of the question, and the speakers agree to be succinct.
What could be simpler, and what could be harder?

As in Thinking Pairs and Round, in Open Discussion to know you will not be interrupted allows you to think better and faster.

The decision to keep interested in what the person will think and say next runs counter to the common belief (untrue assumption) that interruption and cross-fire produce better thinking. Interruption produces adrenaline. Adrenaline reduces attention. Reduced Attention creates poorer thinking.

So in Open Discussion on TE

- Anyone can speak next in no particular order, there is no 'queue' of speakers
- But no one interrupts, and everyone keeps it brief.

Inevitably Open Discussion diminishes in quality as the same 30% of the group begins to dominate. At that point the Chair (or anyone) calls for a

Round, determines the question, the Chair determines the direction of the Round and someone volunteers to be first.

A + B + C = TRANSFORMING MEETINGS

We've looked closely at the ten Components of the TE and at three applications in which the components are used to transform the generative value and experience of a meeting.

At a glance:

Welcome, appreciation and purpose of meeting

Opening Round question
- this will be a positive reflection on work, group or topic

First Agenda item
- Agenda item question confirmed
- Presentation, if appropriate, followed by Clarification Round
- Round on agenda item question
- Discussion (with no interruption)
- Round on refreshed question
- Discussion (with no interruption)
- Round on refreshed question
- Discussion (with no interruption)
- Decision, action, next steps

Next Agenda item
- Same process as above

Burning issues round
- Raising issues to be considered another time

Closing Round
- Appreciation of meeting and colleagues

NB: This format may also include breaking into groups, or Thinking Pairs.

Examples:

- Interviews
- Presentations
- Policy-making meetings

- Staff leadership development meetings

Summary:

Creating a Thinking Environment anywhere