

The 10 components of the Thinking Environment

Developed by Nancy Klein, the Thinking Environment liberates the human mind to think for itself with unprecedented clarity, originality and rigour. Essential to that occurring are 10 components which are described below.

ATTENTION

Attention is an act of creation

In almost any setting the best help we can be is to create the conditions for people to generate their own finest thinking. And when someone is thinking around us, much of the quality of what we are hearing is our effect on them.

In fact, the quality of our attention *determines* the quality of other people's thinking. Attention, driven by deep respect and genuine interest, and without interruption, is the key to a Thinking Environment. Attention is that powerful. It generates thinking. It is an act of creation.

Attention: listening with palpable respect and genuine interest, and without interruption

Equality

Even in a hierarchy people can be equal as thinkers

In a Thinking Environment everyone is valued equally as a thinker. Everyone gets a turn to think out loud and a turn to give attention. To know you will get your turn to speak makes your attention more genuine and relaxed. It also makes your speaking more succinct.

Equality keeps the talkative people from silencing the quiet ones. But it also requires the quiet ones to contribute their own thinking. The result is high quality ideas and decisions.

The Thinking Partnership, Transforming Meetings, and Mentoring in a Thinking Environment are especially effective courses for developing this depth of Equality.

Equality: treating each other as thinking peers; giving equal turns and attention; keeping boundaries and agreements

Ease

Ease creates; urgency destroys

Ease, an internal state free from rush or urgency, creates the best conditions for thinking.

But Ease, particularly in organisations and through the 'push' aspect of social networking, is being systematically bred out of our lives. We need to face the fact that if we want people to think well under impossible deadlines and inside the injunctions of 'faster, better, cheaper, more,' we must cultivate internal ease.

This takes the particular discipline of a Thinking Environment, and it takes a preference for quality over the rush of adrenaline.

Ease: offering freedom from internal rush or urgency

Appreciation

The human mind works best in the presence of appreciation

Society teaches us that to be appreciative is to be naïve, whereas to be critical is to be astute. And so, in discussions we are asked to focus first, and sometimes only, on the things that are not working. The consequence is that our thinking is often specious.

Thinking Environment expertise generates a balanced ratio of appreciation to challenge so that individuals and groups can think at their best.

Appreciation: practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to challenge

Encouragement

To be 'better than' is not necessarily to be 'good'

Competition between people ensures only one thing: if you win, you will have done a better job than the other person did. That does not mean, however, that you will have done anything good. To compete does not ensure certain excellence. It merely ensures comparative success.

Competition between thinkers is especially dangerous. It keeps their attention on each other as rivals, not on the huge potential for each to think courageously for themselves.

A Thinking Environment prevents internal competition among colleagues, replacing it with a wholehearted, unthreatened search for good ideas.

Encouragement: giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas by moving beyond internal competition

Feelings

Unexpressed feelings can inhibit good thinking

Thinking stops when we are upset. But if we express feelings just enough, thinking re-starts. Unfortunately, we have this backwards in our society. We think that when feelings start, thinking stops. When we assume this, we interfere with exactly the process that helps a person to think clearly again.

if instead, when people show signs of feelings, we relax and welcome them, good thinking will resume.

Feelings: allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking

Information

Withholding or denying information results in intellectual vandalism. Facing what you have been denying leads to better thinking

We base our decisions on information, accurate or not, all of the time. When the information is incorrect, the quality of our decisions suffers. Starting with accurate information is essential, therefore, if good independent thinking is our aim.

The importance of information also pertains to the pernicious phenomenon of denial, the assumption that what is happening is not happening. Learning how to formulate questions that dismantle denial is a powerful feature of Thinking Environment expertise.

Information: supplying the facts; dismantling denial

Diversity

The greater the diversity of the group, and the greater the welcoming of diverse points of view, the greater the chance of accurate, cutting-edge thinking

Reality is diverse. Therefore, to think well we need to be in as real, as diverse, a setting as possible.

We need to be surrounded by people from many identity groups, and we need to know that there will be no reprisal for thinking differently from the rest of the group.

The Diversity Session, a series of questions that best reveals and strengthens the diversity of a group, is the basis of another important programme producing Thinking Environment expertise.

Diversity: welcoming diverse group identities and diversity of thinking

Incisive Questions™

A wellspring of good ideas lies just beneath an untrue limiting assumption . An Incisive Question will remove it, freeing the mind to think afresh

Everything human beings do is driven by assumptions. We need to become aware of them, and by asking Incisive Questions, replace the untrue limiting ones with true, liberating ones. The building of Incisive Questions is at the very heart of generating fine independent thinking. These questions have been described as 'a tool of unbelievable precision and power'.

This expertise is also the focus of the Thinking Partnership Course and can be the operating methodology of our Coaching approach.

Incisive Questions: removing assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves clearly and creatively

Place

When the physical environment affirms our importance, we think more clearly and boldly. When our bodies are cared for and respected, our thinking improves

We have found consistently that Thinking Environments are places that say back to people, 'You matter.' People think better when they can arrive and notice that the place reflects their value - to the people there and to the event. Also discovering and allowing yourself to be in the right 'place' allows you to think more boldly and encourage others to do the same.

Place is a silent form of appreciation.

Place: creating a physical environment that says back to people, 'You matter'

To find out how you can generate a Thinking Environment and develop quality thinking and decision making get in touch by emailing laura@mtc2.co.uk