

*Creating Time to Think*¹

Guiding principles

The quality of decisions and actions groups take depends on the quality of the thinking they do first. And the quality of our thinking depends on how we are being treated by the people who are with us.

To be interrupted is not good. To get lucky and not be interrupted is better. But to know you will not be interrupted allows you to truly think for yourself.

The Thinking Environment is the set of ten conditions under which human beings can think for themselves – with rigor, imagination, courage and grace.

Perhaps surprisingly, time is not one of the ten conditions. Time is a by-product of a Thinking Environment. In a Thinking Environment, people think so well in the time they have that the time they have increases.

The Thinking Environment is not just a set of techniques. It is a way of being in the world.

*We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see,
it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer,
perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet.”*
(W B Yeats)

¹ Kline, N (2014), *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind*, (Cassell)

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Research on effect of the Thinking Environment on organisational success²

Organisations know that in order to be successful in the new knowledge age, they must unlock the unique potential of each individual at work.

Leading researchers in the field note that a focus on enhancing how people think, rather than what people do, is essential, and very different from most conventional organisational development practice.

This study showed significant findings in the efficacy of holding meetings in a Thinking Environment as a means of generating people's best thinking.

The study interviewed 15 senior officers from 11 organisations on 3 continents.

It found a 95% consistency in the outcomes of meetings held in a Thinking Environment, including that these meetings time and again:

- Produced a measurable, positive impact on the performance indicators of organisations
- Generated better ideas, solutions and decisions
- Created an environment in which people felt valued and equal
- Achieved resolution faster
- Gave rise to greater participation and involvement from everyone
- Fostered productive working relationships.

"There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that these meetings have produced the best results of any meetings I've been in. It's been a total change. It's been a real eye-opener for me. I've been running meetings for years and years and years, and I've never experienced the feeling of success coming out of meetings that I've felt coming out of these meetings in a Thinking Environment." (Managing Director, Retail)

"I can positively say that as a result of our Thinking Environment culture, our business has improved by at least 20%. And that's measurable in financial terms." (Provincial Director, Financial Services)

² Research by Emily Havers, MSc, University of Portsmouth, UK. A longer account of Havers' research is available at <http://www.timetothink.com>



Creating Time to Think

The Ten Components of a Thinking Environment

Attention

Listening with palpable respect and without interruption

- The quality of your attention profoundly affects the quality of other people's thinking
- As the listener, you must be more drivingly interested in what is real and true for people than you are frightened of being proved wrong
- As the thinker, knowing you will not be interrupted frees you truly to think for yourself

Equality

Treating each other as thinking peers

Giving equal turns and attention

Keeping agreements and boundaries:

- Even in a hierarchy, people can be equals as thinkers
- Knowing you will have your turn improves the quality of your attention

Ease

Offering freedom from internal rush or urgency

- Ease creates; urgency destroys
- When it comes to helping people think for themselves, sometimes doing means not doing

Appreciation

Offering genuine acknowledgement of a person's qualities

Practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism

- The human mind thinks more rigorously and creatively in a context of specific, sincere, succinct praise

Encouragement

Giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas by moving beyond internal competition

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

Feelings

Allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking

- Listening through anger makes way for thorough thinking
- Crying can make you smarter
- After laughter, thinking improves

Information

Supplying the facts

Dismantling denial

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

Diversity

Welcoming divergent thinking and diverse group identities

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

Incisive questions

Removing assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves clearly and creatively

- Right inside an Incisive Question lies the liberation of the human mind

Place

Creating a physical environment that says back to people, 'You matter'

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

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Thinking Pairs: transformative listening

Transformative listening is nearly a work of art. It comes from genuine interest in where your partner will go in their thinking, and from your courage to trust their intelligence.

As you listen:

- Settle back
- Keep your eyes on the eyes of your partner as they speak (remember the person thinking can look wherever they like, but you must be ready with your palpable attention, when they look back at you)
- Cultivate genuine fascination with what your partner will say next
- Aim for a dynamic composure
- Do not interrupt
- Trust that not saying a word is one of the most effective things you can do
- Know that your job is to help your partner think for themselves, not to think for them
- Remember that the expression of feelings is often a part of the thinking process
- Be aware that much of what they say will be the result of your effect on them.

In the quiet presence of your attention, respect, and ease, important things can happen for the partner. Fresh ideas can emerge, confusion can dissipate, painful feelings can subside, creativity can soar. It does not matter if you already know (or think you know) what your partner is about to say before they have said it – do not interrupt or stop them. What matters is what happens for them **because they say it.**

The Exercise

First ask:

*What would you like to think about,
and what are your thoughts?*

Listen

When thinking subsides, ask:

*What more do you think,
or feel, or want to say?*

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Rounds: where everyone matters

Regardless of power differentials and hierarchy, everyone's thinking matters because getting everyone's best thinking produces best results.

In meetings, the best way to ensure we get the best thinking from everyone is to populate the meeting with systematic, uninterrupted Rounds. Rounds increase the generative nature of the group's thinking. Rounds also usually produce superior ideas in less time.

A Round is a simple enough concept, but it requires these four actions from the chair of the meeting:

- 1 Decide first what the question is that people will be addressing in the Round.
- 2 Determine the direction of the Round (to the right, or to the left of the person who speaks first).
- 3 Ask for a volunteer to begin the Round.
- 4 Remind people of the principles for conducting Rounds in a Thinking Environment:
 - o Everyone speaks in turn
 - o No-one interrupts, or speaks again until the Round is complete
 - o In return for not being interrupted, we commit to being succinct
 - o Whenever someone is speaking, the rest of the group listen with respect and attention – ideally keeping their eyes on the eyes of the speaker.

If you do only one thing to improve the thinking in groups, institute Rounds. And be sure to decide first on the question.



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Transforming Meetings

Everyone wants the best possible results from meetings. But the quality of the group's decisions and actions depends on the thinking they do together first.

Throughout the meeting, people need to be able to ***think for themselves with rigour, imagination, courage and grace.*** Too often people behave in meetings in ways that prevent good thinking from occurring.

When all ten components of a Thinking Environment are the ***culture of the meeting***, people's thinking and engagement improve dramatically.

You can transform the meetings you lead by applying the ten components throughout the meeting, and using Thinking Pairs and Rounds to ensure **everyone's best thinking** is brought to the table.

Principles and Actions

<i>PRINCIPLE</i>	<i>ACTION</i>
Everyone matters	In Rounds, give everyone a turn to speak, on every agenda item, and to begin and end the meeting
An accurate view of reality includes what is going well	Begin and end the meeting with a focus on success
Knowing you won't be interrupted allows you truly to think for yourself	Stay interested as each person finishes their thought, especially in fierce debates
Exploring one's own ideas in Thinking Pairs can liberate the thinking of the group	Give people time to think for themselves in five-minute uninterrupted turns each

Top tips for transforming meetings:

- Be sure the meeting is necessary, and that it requires people's thinking. If it doesn't, don't hold the meeting, find another way to complete the task.
- Put each agenda item in the form of a question.
- Create a 'no device' zone.
- Use a positive opening Round to ensure everyone speaks at the start of the meeting (eg *What is going well in your work at the moment? What do you think we as a team/board/organisation are currently doing well?*)
- Teach the group the principles of Rounds and Thinking Pairs, and practice them frequently.



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Practical ways to bring the Thinking Environment to life for lawyers and legal professionals

Take time to think for yourself

Find a Thinking Partner and commit to a ten minute meeting, Skype or phone call two or three times a week, preferably at the beginning of the day. This is a good way to focus your mind at the beginning of the day and to ensure that for five full minutes you get to think uninterruptedly and independently about a topic that is important to you.

How to run a ten-minute Thinking Partner session:

- o *Agree to take a turn of five minutes each to be the Thinker (setting a timer can be helpful).*
- o *Thinking Partner asks the Thinker "What would you like to think about, and what are your thoughts?"*
- o *While the Thinker is having their turn, whether they are speaking or thinking in silence, the Thinking Partner gives complete attention, with no interruption (not even the usual 'mmm' sounds that we normally do to indicate we're there), just full, interested, easeful attention.*
- o *Only if the Thinker says they have nothing further to say, ask them "What more do you think, or feel, or want to say?"*
- o *When the time is up, you can thank each other, but refrain from discussing the content of each other's turn – that will tend to cut short and reduce the independence and quality of the other's thinking. If you would like to ask what the other person thinks about your content, try to keep that to a separate conversation.*
- o *Offer appreciation that is sincere, specific and succinct.*
- o *That's it!*

Transform your meetings

Here are six tips, any of which will improve the quality of any team or group meetings. If you practice them persistently, over time they will change the culture of the team:

- **Rounds:** Make sure everyone speaks within the first five minutes. Do this as a round, where everyone speaks in turn. This is particularly powerful if you begin with something positive, such as *What is going well for the team/on this project?* Or *What is one thing that is going well for you right now?* Rounds can also be used throughout the meeting on specific questions, to make sure you get everyone's best thinking.
- **No interrupting:** Make a group commitment that you will not interrupt when someone else is speaking. (The balancing commitment is to be succinct.)
- **Listen with full attention:** Ask the group to commit to truly listening when someone else is speaking – listening with full attention, eyes on the speaker, not 'waiting for your turn' or preparing what you will say – and definitely not looking at your mobile device.
- **Formulate questions:** Turn all agenda items into questions. The mind thinks better in the presence of a question.

- **Ask 'Do we need a meeting'?** Be sure the meeting is necessary, and that it requires people's thinking. If it doesn't, don't have the meeting (find another way to accomplish the task).

Support better mentoring

Consider these principles and practices of the Thinking Environment when mentoring or coaching:

Attention

Listening with palpable interest, respect and without interruption will profoundly affect the quality of the thinking of the person you are mentoring.

Equality

Even in a hierarchy, people can be equal as thinkers.

Ease

Pay attention to your own sense of urgency or rush. Make efforts to create space for creative thinking by being at ease in yourself. This creates ease for the thinker.

Appreciation

Give praise that is specific, succinct and sincere.

Encouragement

Enable the thinker to go to the cutting edge of their own ideas before offering your own thinking. Holding back from advice until it is truly asked for gives the recipient time to do their own best thinking first.

Deepen client relationships

Internal and external clients also value time to think for themselves. With practice you can become a Thinking Environment for your client. Start by noticing the quality of your attention while they are speaking. Ask them what they think and listen without interruption. Cultivate ease as you listen. Allow them to fully complete their thought before offering your own thoughts. Offer specific, succinct and sincere appreciation.

Design effective off-sites

Use your off-site to generate fresh, cutting-edge thinking from the group, using the principles and processes of the Thinking Environment. The Thinking Environment can be used as a group process to support any discussion topic or action planning that is relevant to you.

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Resources

'Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind' by Nancy Kline (Cassell)

'More Time to Think' by Nancy Kline (Cassell)

Websites

www.timetothink.com

www.openconsulting.global

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