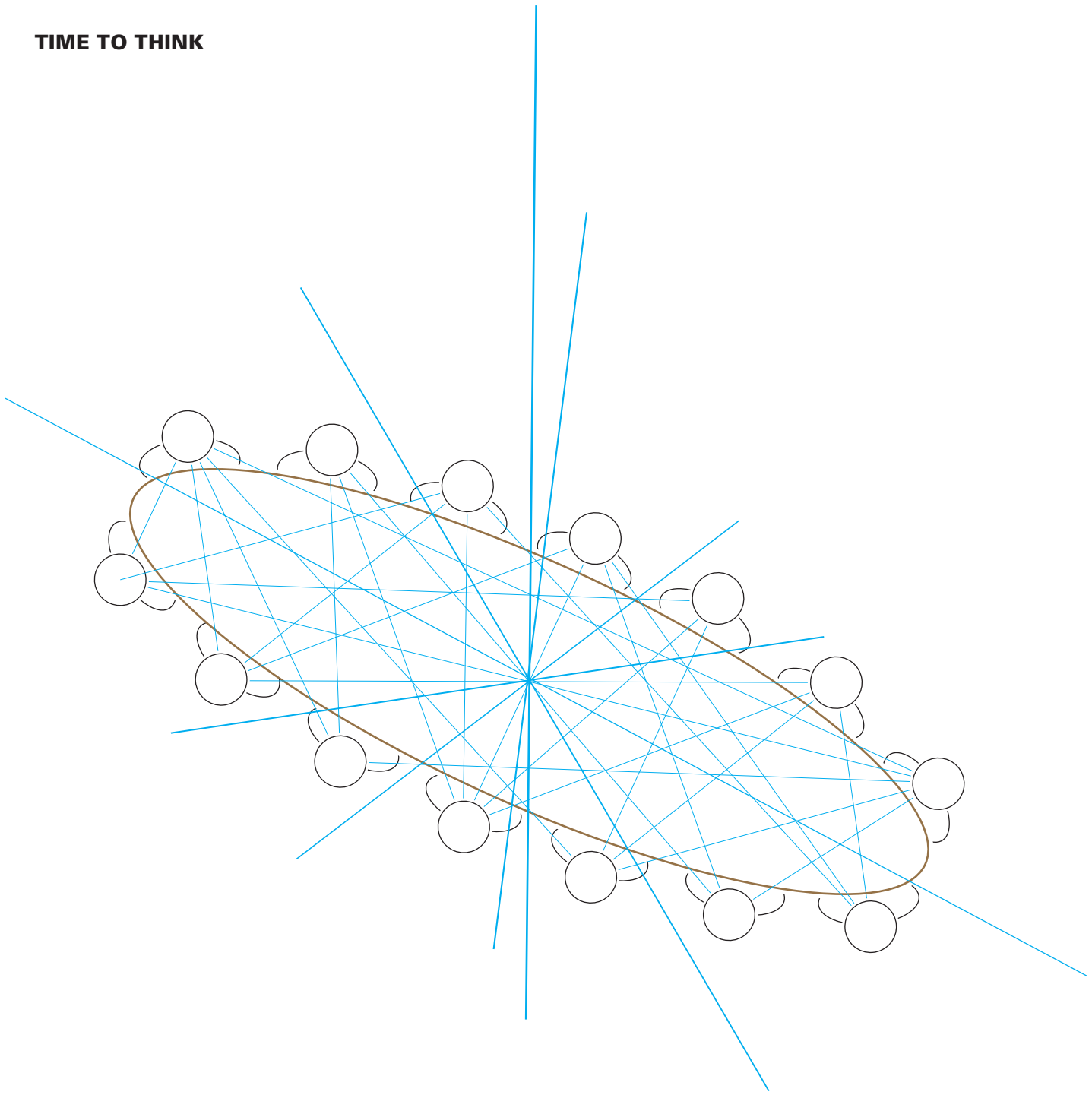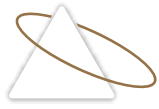# Transforming meetings®
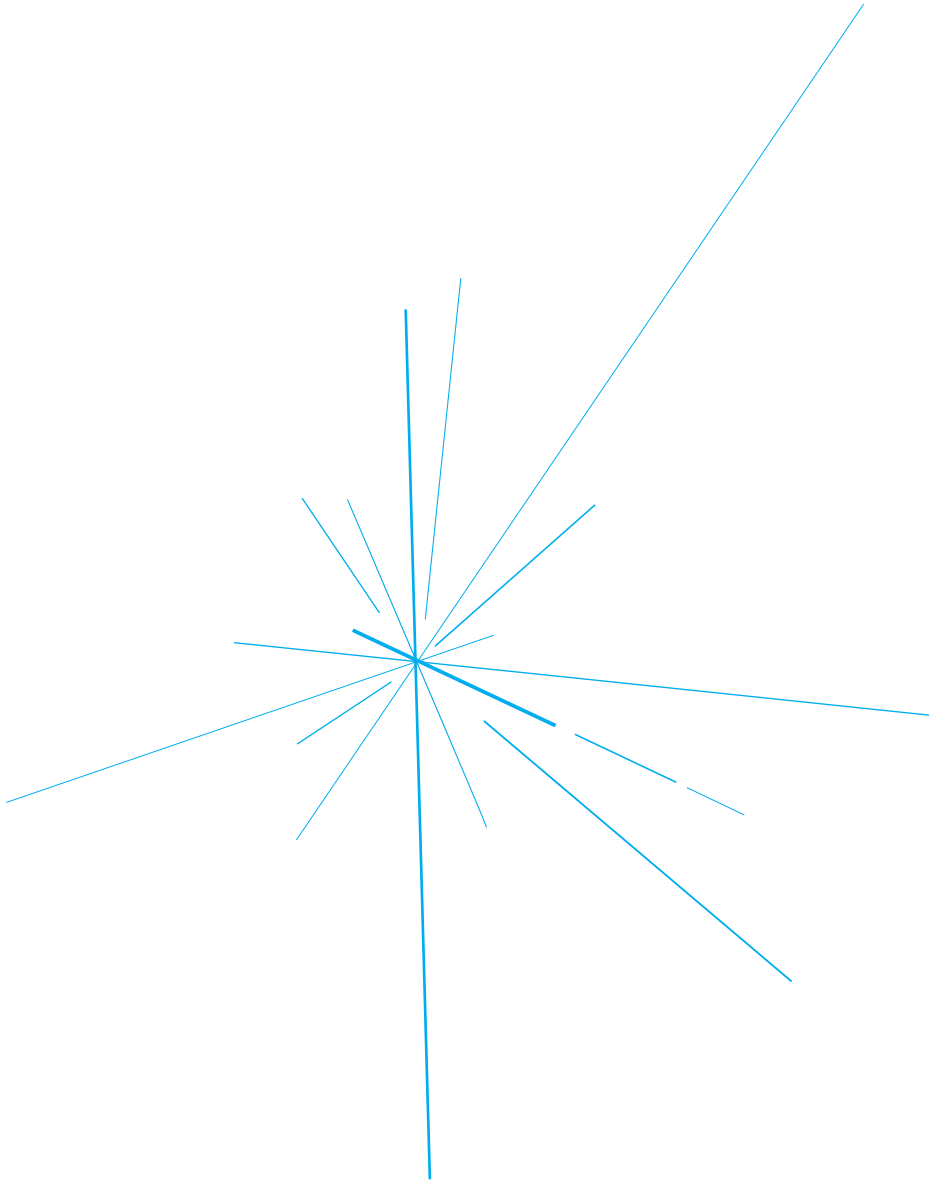
MEETINGS IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT®

**One of the most valuable things
we can offer each other
is the framework in which
to think for ourselves**

A leader's first job is to create a Thinking Environment
Every subsequent act of leadership gains quality from there

Leading in these exigent times is a sophisticated process of articulating a vision compellingly, and getting the best from people so that their work manifests that vision.
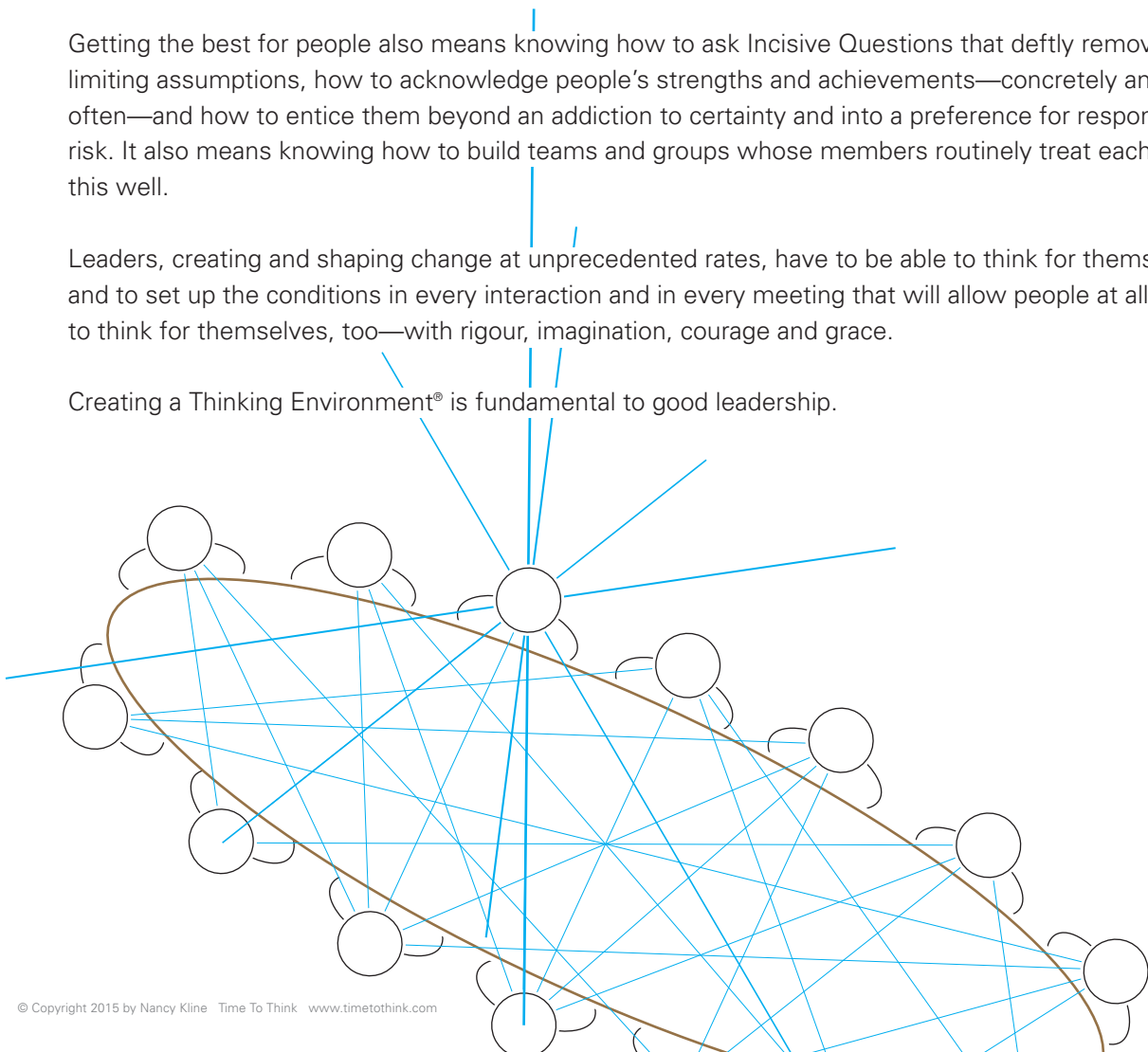
Getting the best from people means getting their best thinking.

This means knowing how to be with people, how to offer them the highest quality attention based on genuine interest in what they think and on the expectation that they can think for themselves better than anyone can think for them.
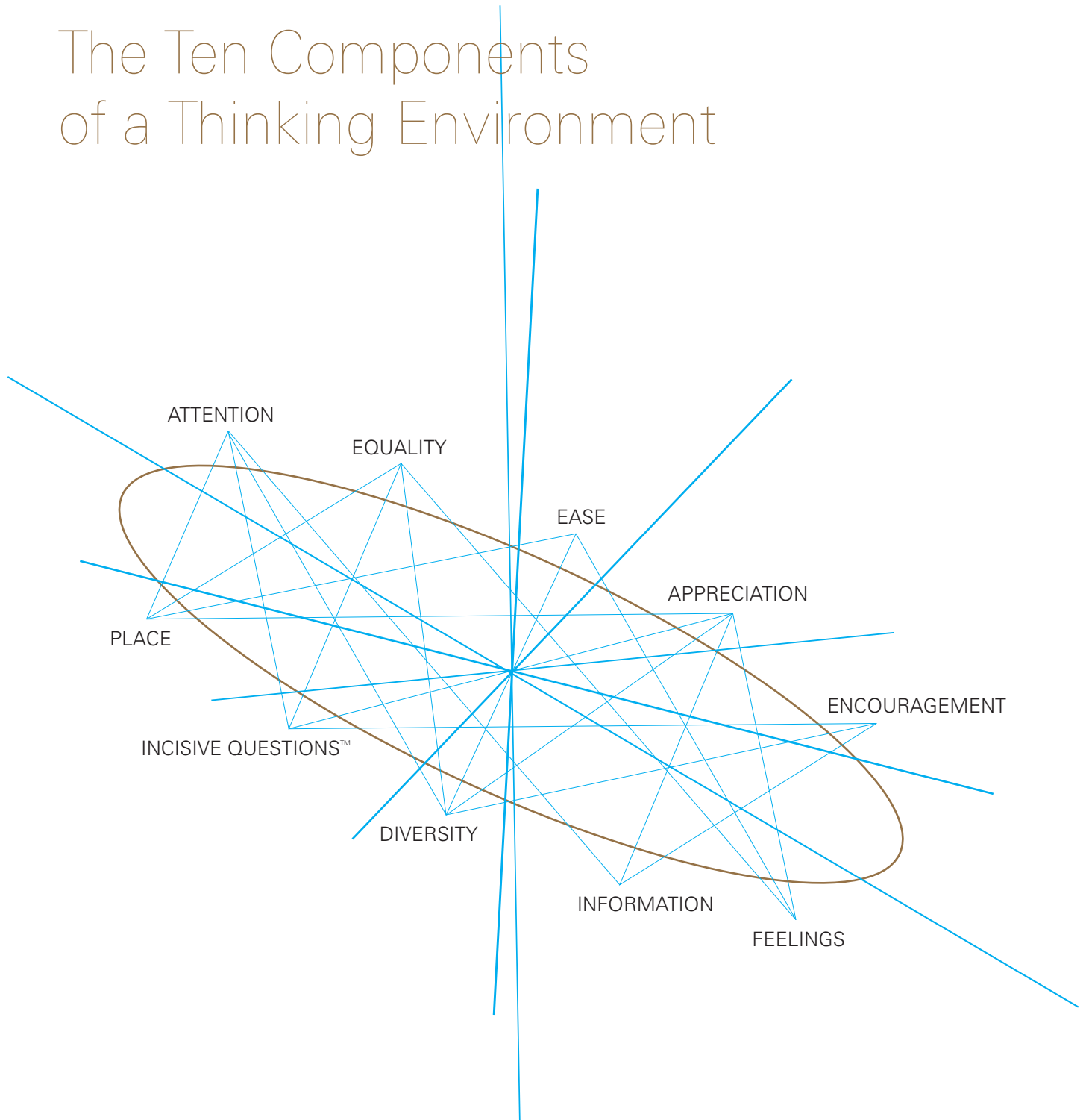
Getting the best for people also means knowing how to ask Incisive Questions that deftly remove limiting assumptions, how to acknowledge people's strengths and achievements—concretely and often—and how to entice them beyond an addiction to certainty and into a preference for responsible risk. It also means knowing how to build teams and groups whose members routinely treat each other this well.

Leaders, creating and shaping change at unprecedented rates, have to be able to think for themselves and to set up the conditions in every interaction and in every meeting that will allow people at all levels to think for themselves, too—with rigour, imagination, courage and grace.

Creating a Thinking Environment® is fundamental to good leadership.

The Ten Components
of a Thinking Environment

ATTENTION

EQUALITY

EASE

APPRECIATION

PLACE

ENCOURAGEMENT

INCISIVE QUESTIONS™

DIVERSITY

INFORMATION

FEELINGS

THE TEN COMPONENTS

1. 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.*

2. 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*

3. 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.*

4. APPRECIATION

Offering genuine acknowledgement of a person's qualities

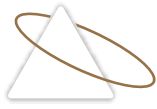Practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism

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

5. 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.*
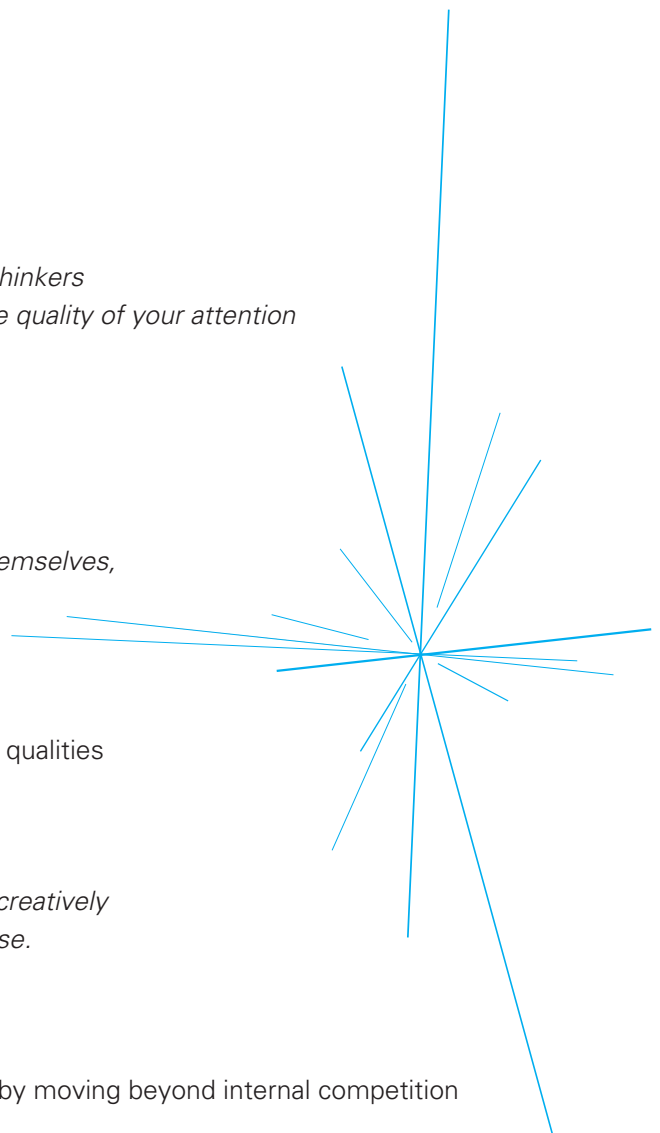
MEETINGS IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT® THE TEN COMPONENTS (continued)

6. FEELINGS

Allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking

— *Listening through the anger makes way for thorough thinking.*
— *Crying can make you smarter.*
— *After laughter thinking improves.*

7. INFORMATION

Supplying the facts

Dismantling denial

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

8. DIVERSITY

Welcoming divergent thinking and diverse group identities

— *The mind works best in the presence of reality. Reality is diverse. Homogeneity is a myth.*

9. INCISIVE QUESTIONS™

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

— *The liberation of the human mind lies right inside an Incisive Question.*

10. PLACE

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

— *When the physical environment affirms their importance, people think more boldly.*
— *When our bodies are cared for and respected, our thinking improves.*

Why it matters

Everyone wants the best possible results from meetings.

But the quality of decisions and actions groups take depends on the thinking they do together first.

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

Behaviour that is consistent with the Ten Components of a Thinking Environment can develop a meeting culture that improves people's thinking and engagement dramatically.

Transforming Meetings uses all four of the Building Block Applications of

— Thinking Pairs
— Dialogue
— Rounds
— Open Discussion
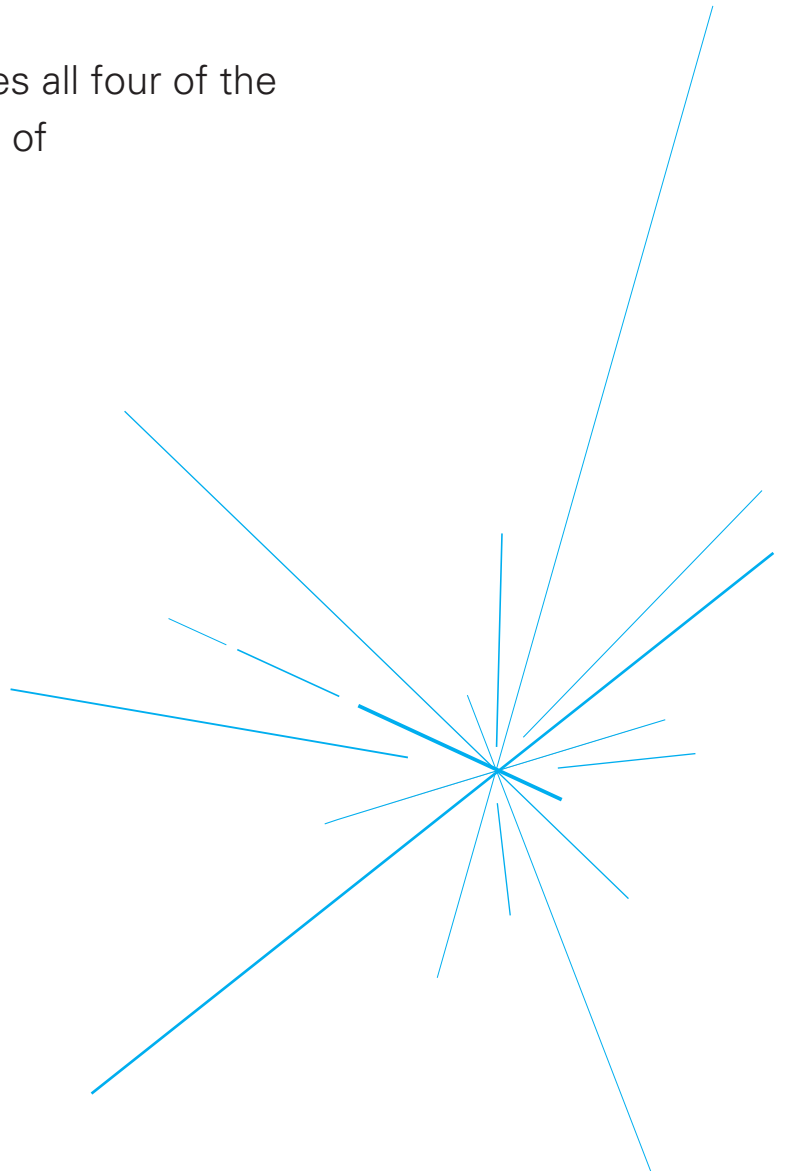
MEETINGS IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT® THE BENEFITS

How meetings in a Thinking Environment impact organisational life

Research by Emily Havers, MSc

University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom

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.

This 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, INSURANCE 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

For the complete precis of the Havers research, please download the PDF at: www.timetothink.com
http://www.timetothink.com/uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=113&Itemid=99999999

Thinking Pairs™

TRANSFORMATIVE LISTENING

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 truly to think for yourself.

Attention is an act of creation

Attention from one person generates thinking in another person.
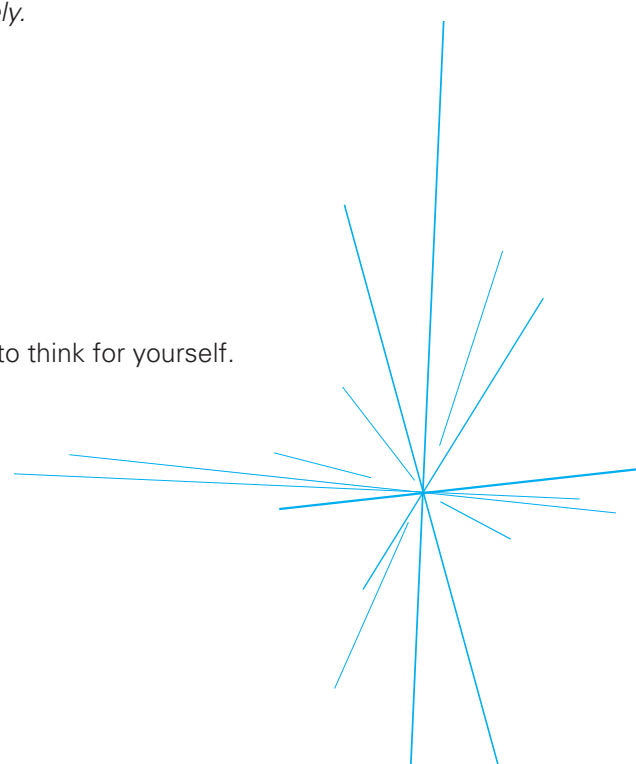Listening to ignite is different from listening to reply.

Attention is also paradox

When you give Attention of this caliber:

— *You are so present you become invisible.*
— *You matter profoundly because you do not matter at all.*
— *You do not need to be needed but are needed entirely.*
— *You are essential, and you are irrelevant.*

In practice:

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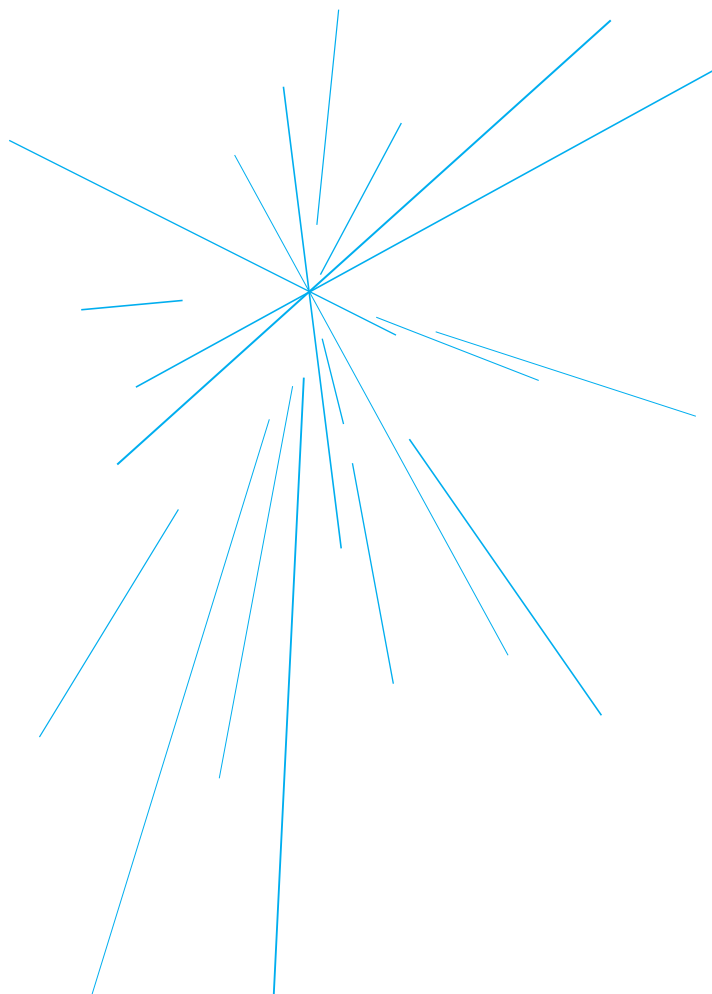
Transformative listening is nearly a work of art. It comes from genuine interest in where your partner will go in their thinking, and from your courage to trust their intelligence.

Adopt this attitude and general behaviour as you listen:

— *Settle back.*
— *Keep your eyes on the eyes of your partner as they speak.*
— *Cultivate fascination with what your partner will say next.*
— *Achieve a composure that is wildly dynamic.*
— *Do not interrupt.*
— *Trust that not uttering 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 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 explode. It does not matter if you already know what your partner is about to say before they have said it— do not interrupt them or stop them. What matters is what happens for them because they say it.

Enjoy this expertise. It is subtle, but powerful.

THE THREE STREAMS OF ATTENTION

Paradoxically, the Thinking Partner must have 100% of their attention in three streams simultaneously throughout the session.

In the first stream the Partner's attention is on the content of what the Thinker is saying.

In the second stream their attention is on their response to what the Thinker is saying.

In the third stream their attention is on the creation of a Thinking Environment for the Thinker.

For the Thinker to think at their best the Partner must generate a fine balance of these three streams. If the second stream begins to dominate, for example (as if often does when the Partner has any investment in the outcome of the session), the first and third streams weaken proportionately, and the quality of the Thinker's thinking is compromised.

When the three streams are in balance, however, the Thinker can sense the quality of attention and generate ideas without impediment.

First Stream
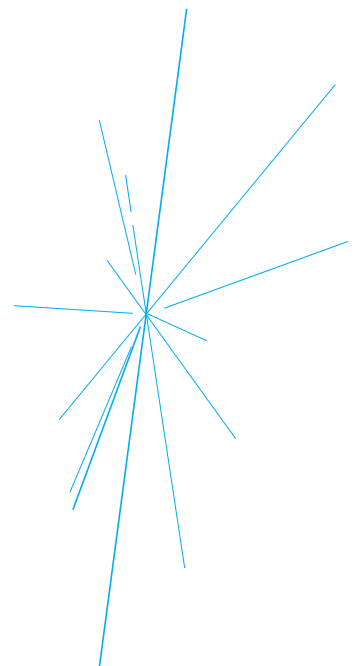100%

Second Stream
100%

Third Stream
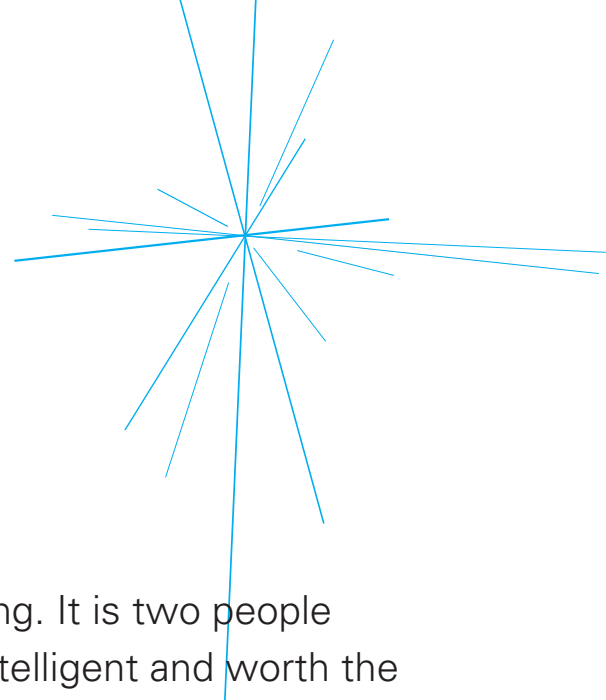100%
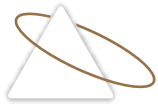
EXERCISE

FIRST ASK:

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

WHEN THINKING SUBSIDES, ASK:

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

Dialogue

Dialogue at its best is not two people talking. It is two people thinking. In order for dialogue to be rich, intelligent and worth the time, both people must offer each other all Ten Components of a Thinking Environment throughout.

Most important, you must listen brilliantly when it is the other person's turn. And listening in a Thinking Environment is born of interest and discipline. It is not just waiting to speak. It is not just getting the gist of what the other person is saying and then usurping their turn out of a physiologically irrepressible urge to speak again.

Listening in a Thinking Environment requires you to be interested not just in what the person is saying, but equally in what they are going to say next. To generate superb dialogue, you must be more interested in what the other person truly thinks and feels than you are frightened of being proved wrong.

At the very least, this means guaranteeing each other that you will not interrupt.

Next, it means sustaining evidence of interest in where the other person will go next with their thoughts—through your face, through eye contact, in the sounds you make in response, and in the ease you generate as you listen.

Finally, it means not taking up all of the time with your turn. Respecting equality of time as well as attention is vital to good dialogue.

Dialogue at its best could be described as Thinking Pairs time on the same topic with short, frequent turns back and forth. The quality of listening should be as good in dialogue as it is in Thinking Pairs. That is usually a huge challenge.

The challenge, in fact, of sustaining a Thinking Environment is greater in Dialogue than in Thinking Pairs because there is a much higher level of emotional investment in the topic (because it is shared) and in the outcome of the exchange. The higher the level of emotional investment the more challenging it is truly to want to know what the other person thinks.

The rewards, however, are worth the discipline.
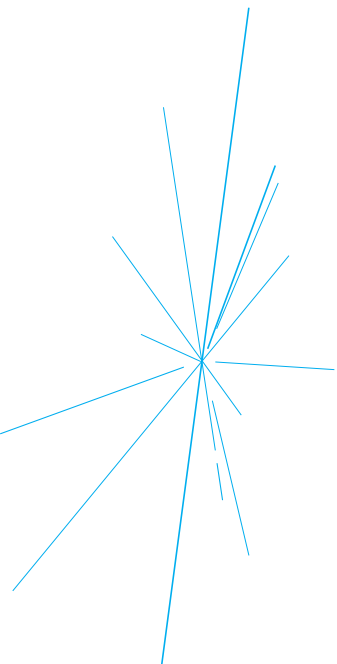
Rounds in a Thinking Environment

Everyone matters.

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

The best way to 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:

1. Decide first what the question is that people will be addressing in the Round.
2. Determine the direction of the Round (clockwise, counterclockwise).
3. Ask for a volunteer to begin the Round.
4. Remind people that no one speaks again until the Round is completed.

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

Open Discussion in a Thinking Environment

What could be simpler than not interrupting?
And what could be harder?

As in Thinking Pairs and Dialogue and Rounds, in Open Discussion to know you will not be interrupted allows you to think better and faster. In a Thinking Environment, because we are interested most of all in generating the finest, freshest thinking, we agree not to interrupt each other in group discussion.

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

So, in Open Discussion in a Thinking Environment anyone can speak next in no particular order. No one raises their hands to be put in a 'queue' of next speakers (in itself an interruption). No one 'tailgates' the speaker.

But no one interrupts. And the person speaking stays true to their promise to be succinct.

Inevitably, Open Discussion diminishes in quality as the same 30% of the group begin to dominate. At that point the Chair (or anyone) calls for a Round, determines the question and the direction of the Round. Someone then volunteers to be first.

Open Discussion is usually the hardest structure within which to balance the Three Streams of Attention. Mastering the skill of Generative Attention while wanting fervently to speak is a challenge. The results are well worth it.
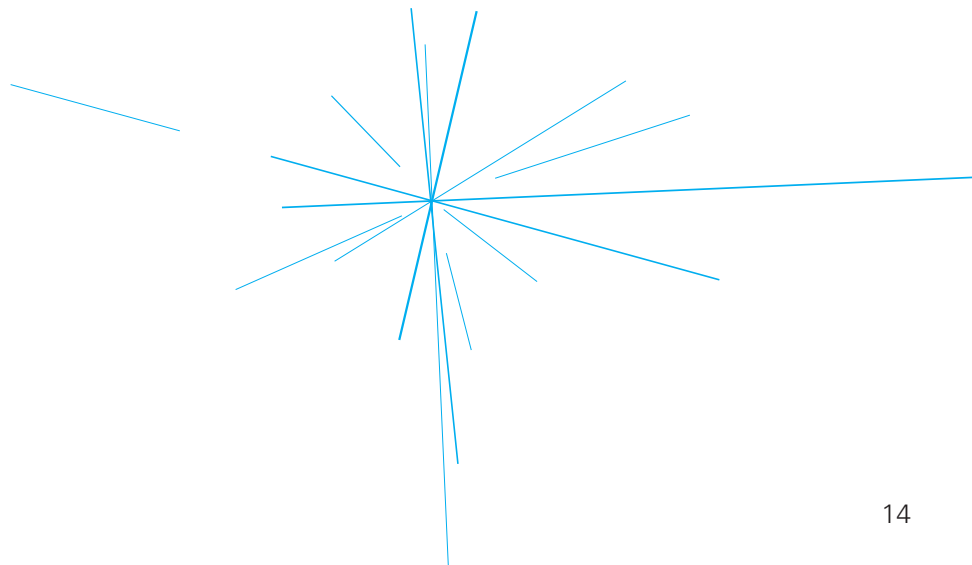
Transforming Meetings
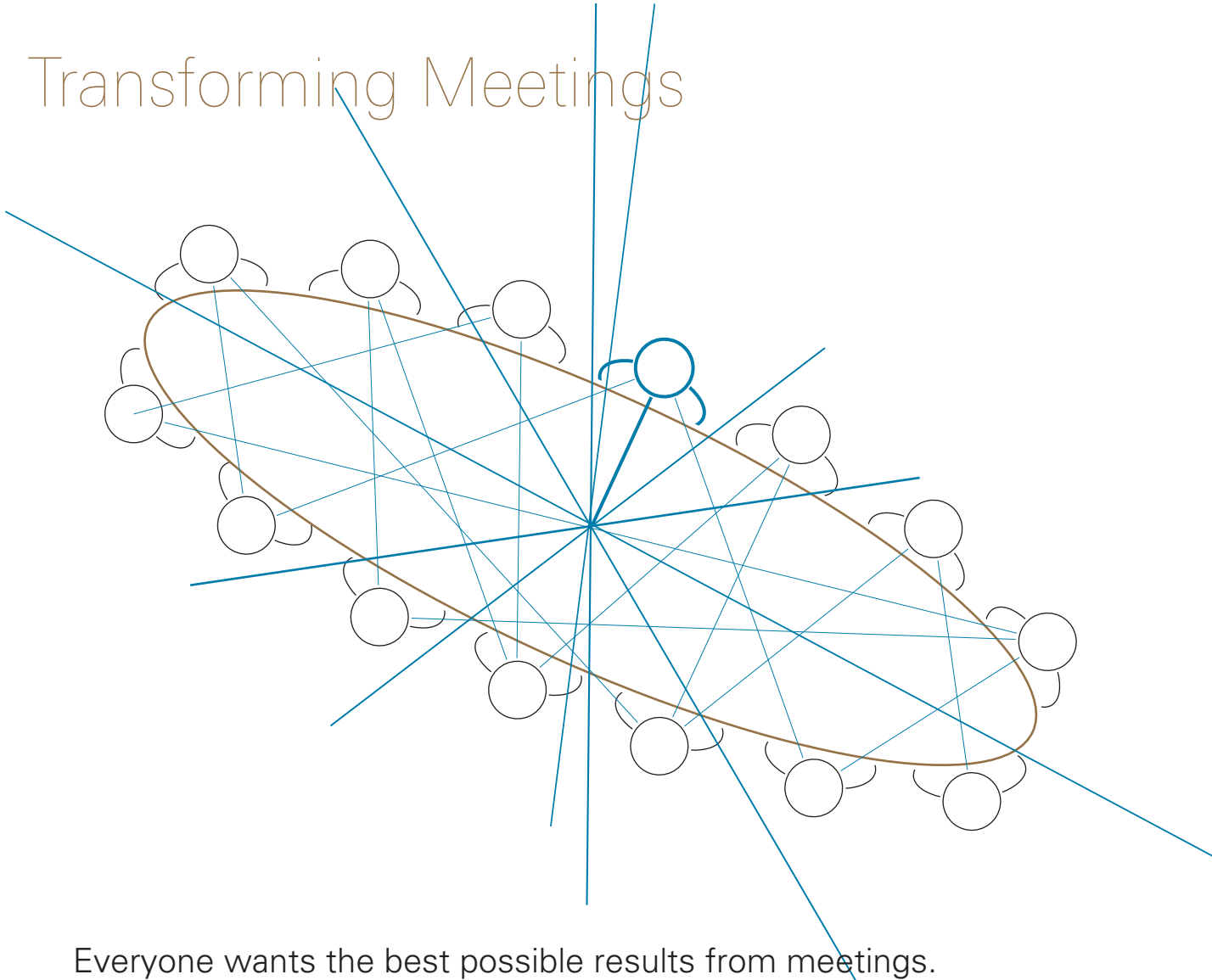
Everyone wants the best possible results from meetings.

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 a meeting, people's thinking and engagement improve dramatically.

Transforming Meetings applies the Ten Components specifically through the Building Block Applications of the Thinking Pairs, Dialogue, Rounds and Open Discussion.

MEETINGS IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT® TRANSFORMING MEETINGS
PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS

PRINCIPLE

ACTION

1. Everyone matters.

In Rounds give everyone a turn to speak, on every agenda item and to begin and end the meeting.

2. An accurate view of reality includes what is going well. Appreciation helps people think well.

Begin and end the meeting with a focus on success.

3. Knowing you won't be interrupted allows you truly to think for yourself.

Stay interested as each person finishes their thought, especially in fierce debate.

4. 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.

s

THE OPENING ROUND

Going systematically around the group, the Chair of the meeting gives everyone a turn to answer positively-focused questions such as:

— *What is going well in your work at the moment?*
— *What do you think we as a team (board, organisation, etc.) are currently doing well?*

THE AGENDA

The Chair confirms the Agenda and identifies the first item for discussion.
— *Each item is in the form of a question that focuses on the desired outcome from discussion of that item*

ADDRESSING EACH AGENDA ITEM

PRESENTATION
— *If there is a presentation, the Chair introduces the Presenter and reminds the Team to wait until the presentation has ended before asking questions or making comments.*
— *The Presenter says what question(s) the presentation will be answering and restates the discussion question the Team will be addressing in the first Round.*

CLARIFICATION ROUND
— *Going systematically around the Team, the Chair asks <u>everyone</u> for any clarifying questions. of the Presenter. The Chair makes sure this Q&A <u>does not</u> turn into a discussion.*

AGENDA ITEM QUESTION
— *The Chair then asks the Agenda Item Question, going systematically around the Team, and only after <u>everyone</u> has had a turn does the Chair allow open discussion.*
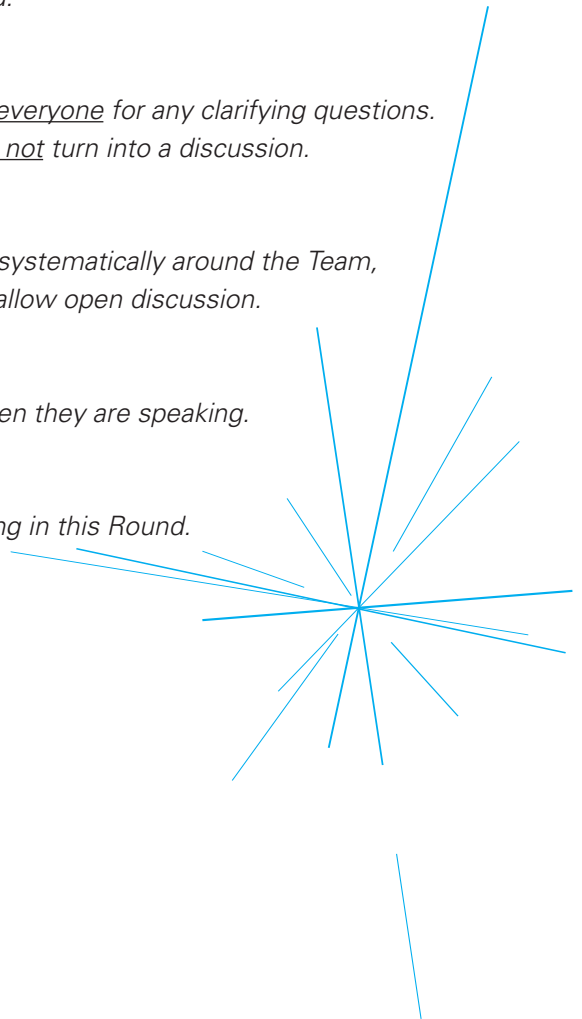
OPEN DISCUSSION ROUND
— *The Chair sees to it that people are not interrupted when they are speaking.*

ROUND
— *The Chair asks the question the Team will be addressing in this Round.*

DISCUSSION, ROUND, DISCUSSION, ROUND... etc.

MEETINGS IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT® TRANSFORMING MEETINGS
THE MEETING IN PRACTISE (continued)

ADDITIONAL PROCESSES

THINKING PAIRS
— *At useful points the Team can break into pairs to think for a few minutes, each without interruption about a point under discussion. Then the Chair conducts a Round, asking for a key idea from each person.*

DIALOGUE
— *Good dialogue could be described as Thinking Pairs on the same topic with short, frequent turns back and forth. The quality of listening should be as good in Dialogue as it is in Thinking Pairs*
— *Dialogue is more challenging for people than Thinking Pairs and Rounds, for example, because it is a more familiar structure. The more familiar the structure, the more challenging it it sto sustain it as a Thinking Environment..*

REMOVING ASSUMPTIONS
— *Frequently in the meeting people can ask themselves or the Team these questions:*
    — *What might we be assuming that could be limiting our thinking on this issue?*
    — *If we assumed something more liberating, what might our ideas be?*

DECISION AND ACTION
— *Frequently in the meeting decisions are made and action items agreed by whatever means the Team usually makes decisions. The Chair makes clear what that process is.*

BURNING ISSUES

When the meeting is almost at an end, the Chair asks each person:

— *Is there a burning issue that you think we should address at another time?*

THE CLOSING ROUND

Any concerns should have been handled or mentioned by this point so that the closing can be wholly positive. The Chair asks everyone to answer positively-reflective questions such as:

— *What do you think went well in the meeting?*
and ideally
— *What one quality do you respect in the colleague sitting to your right?*
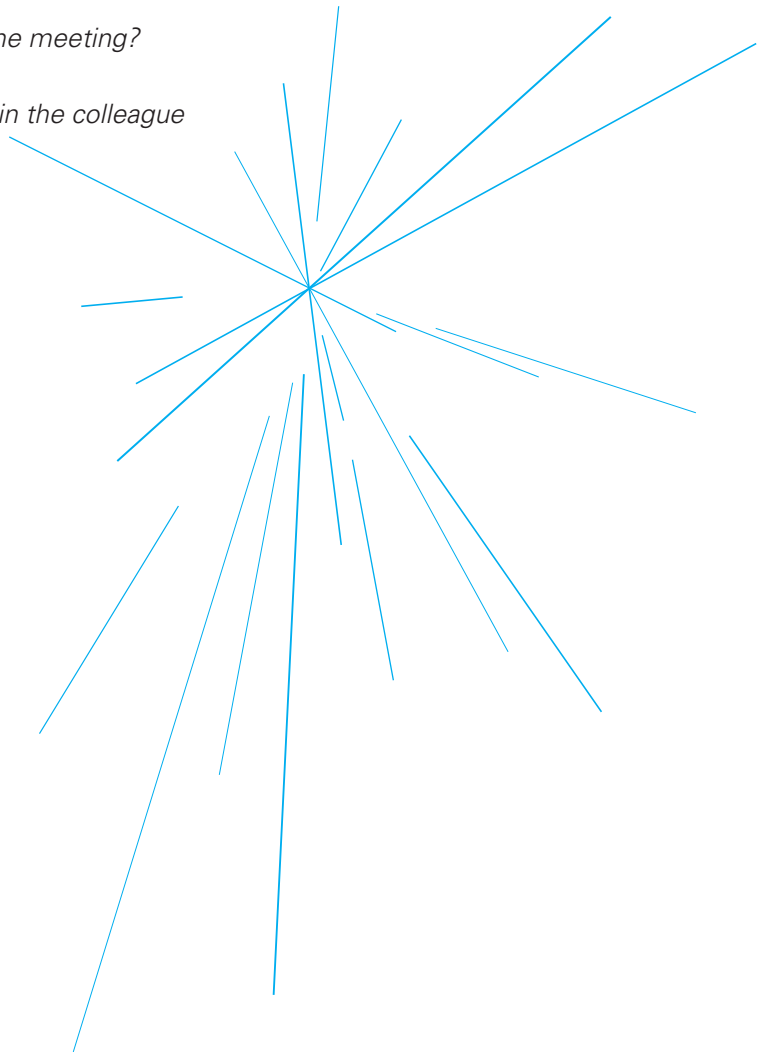
TRANSFORMING MEETINGS AT A GLANCE

Welcome, appreciation and purpose of meeting

Opening Round question
— *positive reflection on work, group or issue*

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)
— Round, etc.

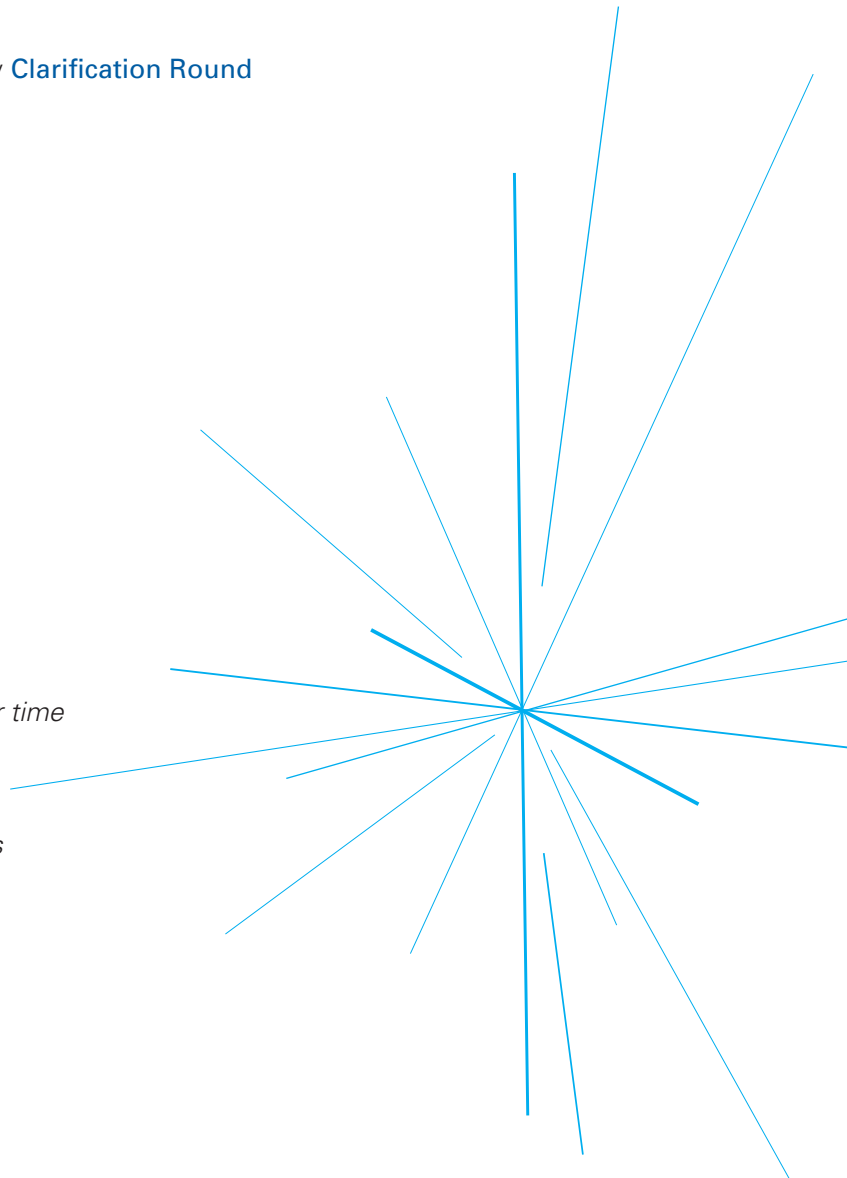— Decision, action, next steps

Next agenda item
— *same process as above*

Burning issues round
— *raising issues to be considered another time*

Closing Round
— *appreciation of meeting and colleagues*

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

1. Be sure the meeting is necessary and that it required people's thinking. If it doesn't, don't have the meeting. Find another way to accomplish your mission. Meetings should make the best possible use of the intelligence, talents and time of each Team member.

2. Put each Agenda item in the form of a question.

3. If papers are to be sent to Team members ahead of the meeting, introduce each paper with a question that will focus their thinking as they read, and about which they will be expected to give their ideas at the meeting.

4. Periodically review the five PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS (p16).

5. After someone's turn in a Round, if clarification or additional information is needed, provide the information efficiently and return to the Round. Do not get into rebuttal or discussion until the Round is finished. Completed Rounds have a particular and valuable effect on the generative quality of the Team's ideas.

6. During Rounds, when it is not your turn, do not comment on what people say in their turns.

7. In discussion remember to keep your eyes on the eyes of the person speaking.

8. Notice your nervous body language and stop it. Replace it with attention and interest.

9. Learn to use OHPs and PowerPoint in such a way that you can simultaneously sustain a strong, supple and personal connection with the group. This is a challenge.

10. When scribing on a flip chart (someone other than the Chair should scribe) do not begin to write until the person speaking has finished formulating their point. Then ask the person to condense their point and scribe it, using only **their own words**. Avoid paraphrasing.

11. When appreciating or acknowledging each other as colleagues, be succinct, sincere and specific. Also, do not begin with caveats such as 'I don't really know what to say, but...'. Do not criticise yourself with phrases such as 'I only wish I had a tenth of your talent...'.

12. When receiving appreciation, listen all the way through it, keeping your eyes on the eyes of the person appreciating you. When they finish, say simply, 'Thank you.'

13. Keep the environment free of cell phone ringing and pager alerts, laptop use and, except for presentations, other technological distractions.

14. Allow for comfort breaks every 80–100 minutes. Stop the practice of getting up during discussion, except to take care of seriously unsavoury personal emergencies.

MEETINGS ON THE TELEPHONE

1. Establish the Component of Place

— *Ensure that the telephone technology is workable for everyone and is the best possible for the meeting.*

— *Send out the agenda ahead of the call, inclusive of approximate times of each person's turn per agenda item.*

— *Create the virtual table. Draw a circle of names of attendees. Tell the group who is to next to whom.*

— *Eliminate all forms of distraction. This includes putting all digital devices to sleep (not just on mute), unless they are in active use for an agenda item.*

2. Conduct the meeting as a Thinking Environment

— *Telephone meetings make use of all the guidelines and processes that work so well in a face-to-face Thinking Environment. A few additional important behaviours are crucial when the meeting is a Teleconference:*

  — *Remind people that their attention for the person who is speaking is to be as seamless and generative as it would be face-to-face and that this can be particularly challenging when no one can see each other. Remind people also that checking emails can be sensed by the speaker.*

  — *Establish timed turns for Rounds. Ask everyone to have their own timepiece to keep track of their time during their turn.*

  — *Ask participants to signal when they have completed their turn by saying so both in Rounds and in Open Discussion.*

  — *Attempt a ratio of 3:1 Rounds to Open Discussion.*

  — *Schedule a stretch break after the first hour and keep the total meeting time to two hours.*

Under Development:

— *Look for opportunities to break into Thinking Pairs or Dialogue either by making a separate call and returning to the group, or by using sympathetic technology.*
— *Establish a method for capturing ideas (or taking minutes) that works well with the technology and the Thinking Environment.*
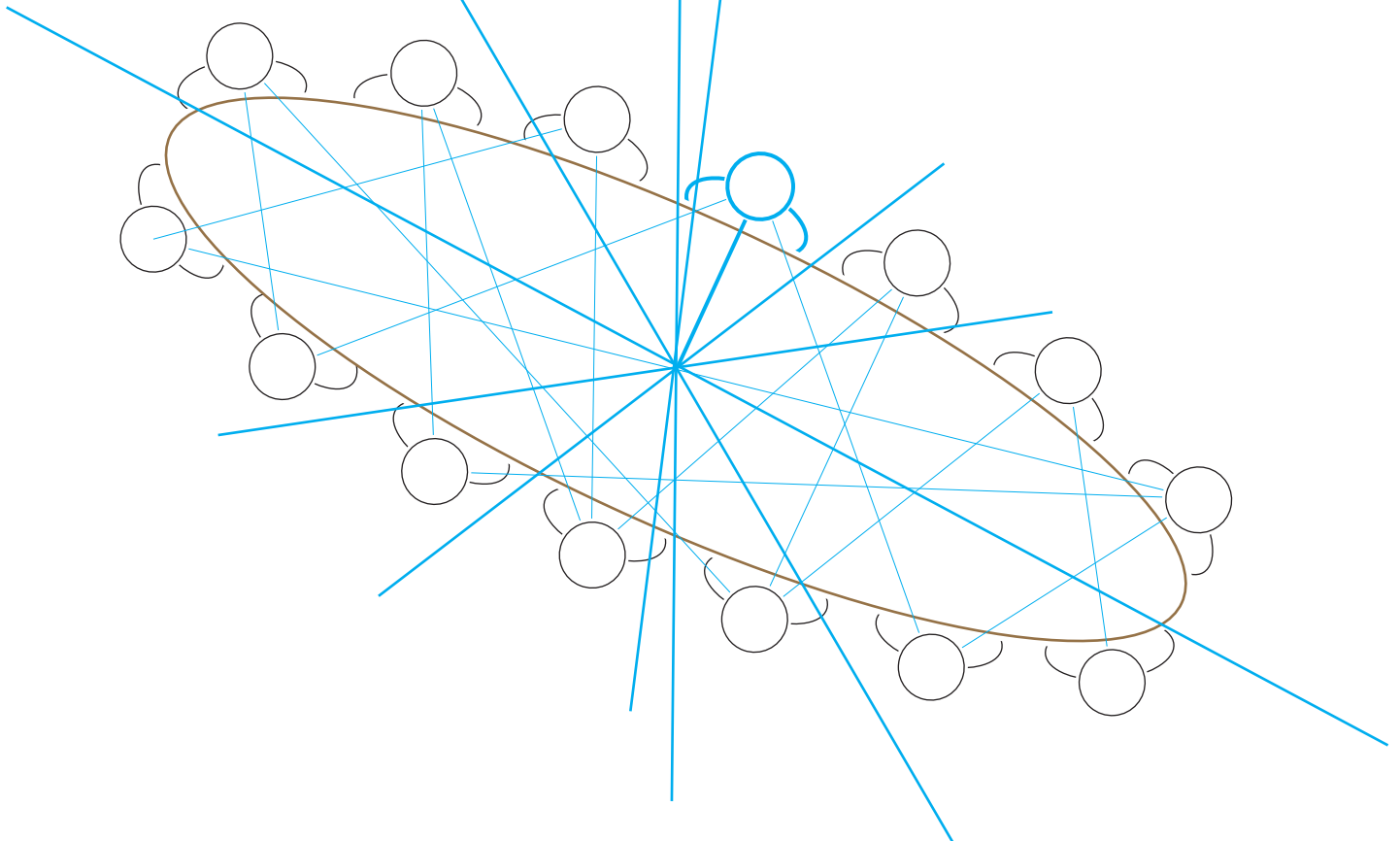

Video-conferences:

We recommend that you contact Nicola Strong of Strong Enterprises (www.strong-enterprises.com) for state-of-the-art training in creating Thinking Environments with video technology.

The Time To Think Council

You want to solve a problem. You would like to think for yourself about it, but along the way you would like access to the knowledge, experience and information inside the treasure troves that are your colleagues. How can they offer you what they know without telling you what to think?

The Time To Think Council is one very effective way. It allows for the wisdom of the group to make its way unintrusively into the problem-solving of one person.

And it does not matter what your problem is. Uncannily, when asked and listened to in this way, each member of your group has something valuable to offer you.

This process also illustrates the fact that when everyone thinks for themselves and listens well to everyone else, everyone's thinking improves.

THE PRESENTATION

1. The Facilitator asks the Presenter to present the issue and to talk about it in such a way that the Council hears everything the Presenter thinks they should know. The Facilitator asks for a volunteer to scribe.

2. The Facilitator asks the Presenter to formulate the question that they want the Council to address.

3. The Facilitator asks if anyone in the Council has a question about the Presenter's question. This is done in a round.

4. The Facilitator confirms the Presenter's question.

5. In a Round each member of the Council responds to the Presenter's question. There are no interruptions; and everyone gives generative Attention to the person speaking. The Scribe records the essential points from each person's turn.

6. When the Round is complete, the Facilitator asks the Presenter: What is your freshest thinking now?

7. All members of the Council express in turn a quality they admire or appreciate about the Presenter. The Scribe records these appreciations and then gives all notes to the Presenter.
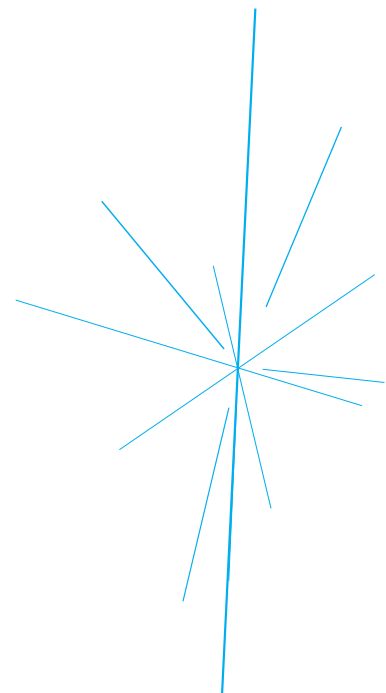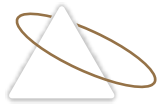
MEETINGS IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT®
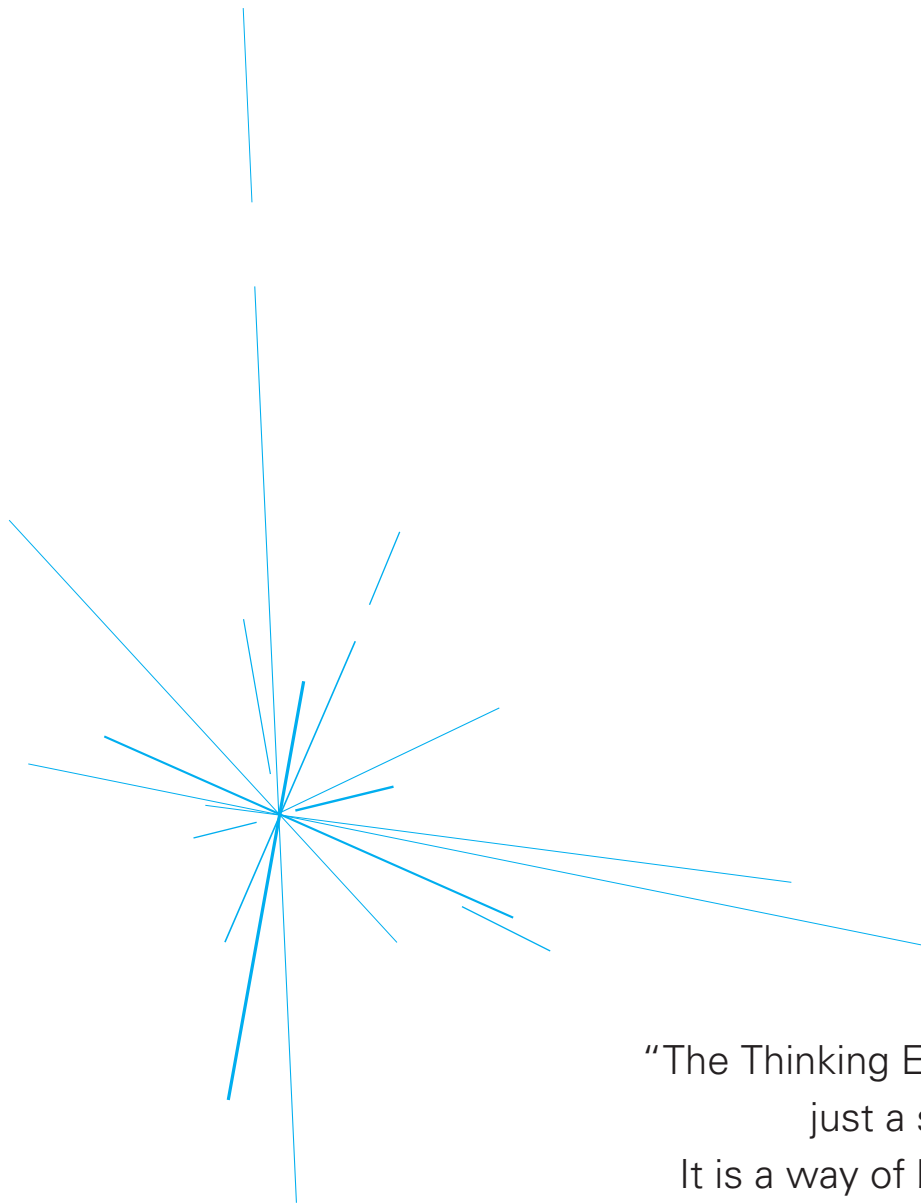
"The Thinking Environment is not just a set of techniques. It is a way of being in the world"

SHIRLEY EDWARDS
Vice President Organisation Effectiveness
Xerox Corporation