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# Coaching to Develop Awareness of Culture, Diversity and Power Issues

*Creating a Diverse Thinking Environment*

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**26 September 2009**

## Creating a Diverse Thinking Environment

Leading in a multicultural and diverse environment

Understanding Diversity and Power

Principles of a Thinking Environment

Positive Philosophical Choice

The Ten Components or Behaviors

Group Identity and a Thinking Environment

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## Leading in a multicultural and diverse environment

“Leading in a multicultural and diverse environment is like playing several instruments. It partly calls for different attitudes and skills: restraint in passing judgement and the ability to recognize that familiar tunes might have to be played differently. Our natural tendency is to watch the world from behind the windows of a cultural home and to act as if people from other countries, ethnicities, or categories have something special about them (a culture) but home is normal. Awareness means the discovery that there is no normal position in cultural matters.”

*Hofstede, G. (2005:ix). Foreword. In: M. L. Connerley and P. B. Pedersen, Leadership in a Diverse and Multicultural Environment (pp. ix–x). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.*



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## Understanding Diversity and Power

- Diversity is ultimately about power, and the lack of it – who has it and who doesn't. We often aren't aware of the everyday, commonplace and unconscious assumptions we make in the face of difference. This means we can unthinkingly exercise our power.
- Equality and power are related in many ways because power creates its own justifying worldview. Often this becomes an unexamined rationalization for the dominant group's power which negates the view of those without power.
- Diversity must mean an absolute assumption of equality in the face of difference. If we encourage people to think for themselves, diversity gives a more complete picture of reality and we develop a sense of internal ease and curiosity.

## Principles of a Thinking Environment

1. The quality of everything we do depends on the thinking we do first.
2. Our thinking depends on the quality of our behavior with each other.
3. The key factor in the quality of a person's thinking is the way they are being treated by the people with them while they are thinking.
4. In a Thinking Environment we think so well in the time we have that the time we have increases.
5. Thinking *for yourself* is still a radical act.
6. In order to know what we think about something, we usually have to talk about it first.
7. The first job of a leader is to create an environment in which people can think for themselves. Every subsequent act gains quality from there.
8. Giving everyone a turn raises the quality of ideas in meetings.
9. There is no such thing as *just* listening. Listening is a catalytic act.
10. To be interrupted is not good. To get lucky and not be interrupted is better. But to know you are not going to be interrupted allows you truly to think for yourself.

*Kline, N. (1999/2004). Time to Think: Listening with the Human Mind. London: Ward Lock.*



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## The Positive Philosophical Choice

- The work of Thinking Partnerships is based on the chosen philosophical view that human beings are by nature good, intelligent, loving, powerful, multi-talented, emotional, assertive, able to think through anything, imaginative and logical. Behavior to the contrary is seen as the result of assumptions generated over a lifetime by events, conditions and attitudes in a person's environment
- A positive philosophy of human nature has become the basis of Thinking Environment work for pragmatic reasons. We have observed that cogent, coherent, imaginative ideas flow more dependably from this philosophy of human nature than from a more neutral or cynical one.
- A positive philosophical choice has proven to be the best one from which to free the human mind to think independently, clearly, creatively and in the best real interests of people.



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# The Ten Components



1. **Attention** : listening with palpable respect, interest and without interruption
2. **Incisive questions**: removing assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves clearly and creatively
3. **Equality**: treating each other as thinking peers, giving equal turns and attention, keeping agreements and boundaries
4. **Appreciation**: practicing a five-to-one ratio of appreciation to criticism, and offering genuine acknowledgement of another's qualities
5. **Ease**: Offering freedom from internal rush or urgency; ease creates and urgency destroys
6. **Encouragement**: moving beyond competition
7. **Feelings**: allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking
8. **Information**: supplying the facts and managing organizational denial
9. **Place**: creating a physical environment that tells people they matter
10. **Diversity**: welcoming diverse thinking and diverse group identities



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# 10 Components of a Thinking Environment



## Attention

- Paying respectful attention allows people to access their own ideas first.
- People are more likely to act on ideas that are their own.
- **Don't interrupt.**
- **Don't finish people's sentences for them.**
- Ask the question: "What else do you think about this?"
- Learn to be comfortable with **silence.**

## Incisive questions

- Incisive questions remove limiting assumptions, freeing the mind to think afresh.
- An incisive question accurately identifies the assumption and replaces it with a freeing one.
- The key is **listening with precision** so that you can cut to the core.
- **Examples:**
  - If you knew that you are as intelligent as your bosses, how would you present yourself to them?
  - If you were to become the MD, what problem would you solve first and how would you do it?
  - If you knew that you are vital to this organization's success, how would you approach your work?



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# 10 Components of a Thinking Environment



## Equality

- Everyone gets a turn to think out loud and a turn to listen.
- Even in a hierarchy, people can be equal as thinkers.
- Knowing you will have your turn improves the quality of your listening and makes your speaking more succinct.
- Knowing you will have to listen makes you more open-minded and generous.
- Equality keeps the louder people from silencing the quieter ones - and it requires the quieter ones to contribute.
- Allow everyone to speak without rush or interruption.

## Appreciation

- A 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism helps people think for themselves - especially when they know specifically how they are appreciated.
- Appreciation needs to be genuine, succinct, concrete and preferably immediate.
- The higher up people are in an organization, the more appreciation they need and the less they get.
- We also need to learn not to be dismissive about praise / appreciation - just to say: "thank you, that makes me feel great".
- When you have to give criticism or negative feedback, begin and end with something genuinely positive. If possible, focus not on everything that is bad, but on the key thing which, were it to change, would change the rest for the better.



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# 10 Components of a Thinking Environment



## Ease

- **Ease creates. Urgency destroys and keeps people from thinking clearly.**
- **Organizations tend to be uncomfortable with being at ease - in the moment, with the self, with the beat of life as it actually is.**

## Encouragement

- **Competition stifles encouragement and limits thinking. To be “better than” is not necessarily to be good.**
- **Competition ensures that if you win, you will have done a better job than the other person - but not necessarily a good job.**
- **Competition between thinkers prevents the questions nobody wants asked from being asked. It keeps your attention on your rival, not on what you really think.**



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# 10 Components of a Thinking Environment



## Feelings

- Thinking stops when we are upset. But if we express feelings, thinking re-starts.
- Yet we think that when feelings start, thinking stops.
- Stopping the release does not stop the pain - it just goes underground.
- Repression of feelings represses clear thinking.
- The next time someone cries in your presence, act as if it is perfectly natural and mature.

## Information

- Supply information **only** when you are sure it will make a decisive difference in the direction, content or progress of the person's thinking. Beware of wanting to correct, and a desire to give information to show off.
- Don't ask for information if it will **interrupt** a successful stream of thought.
- Discern which information is important, and which is superfluous - by **paying attention** and being still inside yourself.



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# 10 Components of a Thinking Environment



## Place

- A thinking environment says “ you matter” . The physical environment needs to reflect this.

## Diversity

- Diversity raises the intelligence of groups.
- Embracing diversity frees the mind of two limiting assumptions:
  - ✓ That the dominant group is superior, and that everyone should be / think like them.
  - ✓ That because the dominant group is superior, it should have power over the others.
- The assumption made about every minority or disenfranchised group is “you can’t think”. People outside and inside the group believe this and spread that untrue assumption.
- The minute you begin listening to someone, your assumption about their ability to think for themselves will affect how well you pay attention and how confident you are in the likelihood that they will think perhaps even better than you can about their issue.

# Male Conditioning: Play the Role of Thinker

- Men are trained to play the role of Thinker but not that of Thinking Partner and to assume the best help is to give others their ideas – and to **do their thinking for them**.
- **Limiting messages** in men’s culture discourage them from creating a Thinking Environment for others and dictate against the 10 components.
- **Limiting messages** are that “real men don’t do feelings; asking questions erodes your power base; criticism is the road to real improvement, and success is defined as winning”.
- **Liberating messages** in men’s culture encourage them to create an internal thinking environment for themselves (men are more intelligent and logical than women; their thinking matters; men should be listened to).

Thinking Environment	Male Conditioning
Listen	Take over and talk
Ask incisive questions	Know everything
Establish equality	Assume superiority
Appreciate	Criticize
Be at ease	Control
Encourage	Compete
Feel	Toughen
Supply accurate information	Lie
Humanize the place	Conquer the place
Create diversity	Deride difference

# Female Conditioning: Play the Role of Thinking Partner

- **Women are primarily** socialized to play the role of the Thinking Partner but not that of the Thinker.
- **Limiting messages** in women’s culture (defer to others; keep quiet; women are too emotional; men are more important than women) discourage women from playing the Thinker role and from creating an internal thinking environment for themselves.
- **Liberating messages** in women’s culture encourage women to develop an external thinking environment for others.
- **The liberating messages** in women’s culture prepare them to support all 10 components of the Thinking Environment.

Thinking Environment	Female Conditioning
Voice your ideas	Keep quiet, defer
Remove limits with incisive questions	Accept your limits
See yourself as equal	Assume inferiority
Welcome appreciation	Doubt yourself
Relax, enjoy your turn	Rush, give time to others
Focus on what you really think	Strive to be accepted
Feel feelings to think clearly	You feel feelings because you are weak
Seek accurate information	Soften the truth for others
Let the place say people matter	Defer to men’s idea of place
Claim your own diverse identities	Blend in



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## Coaching Exercise: Removing Group Identity Limiting Assumptions –



### Groups With Whom You Identify

- 1) What are the groups with whom you identify and about whom society makes assumptions that can limit those groups' power, dignity and confidence?
- 2) Of those which are the three group identities that today, for whatever reason, most stand out for you?
- 3) What is the key group identity for you among those three?
- 4) What limiting assumptions does the world make about that group?

### Liberating Alternative Assumptions

- 5) Of those assumptions which one do you think is the most limiting?
- 6) Do you think that assumption is, in fact, **inherently true** of that group? What are your reasons for thinking that?
- 7) What would be your words for a liberating **true** alternative to that assumption?
- 8) If you and the world knew that (true liberating assumption) what would change for you and the world?

