

## The Thinking Environment Organization

By  
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"What would an organization have to do," a colleague asked me recently. "to qualify as a *Thinking Environment Organization*?"

"That is a concept close to my heart at the moment," I said. I was pleased she asked because we are getting a clearer and clearer answer to that question every month. More and more organizations and teams are taking on the challenge of learning and applying the Thinking Environment principles and processes. Their cultures are changing for the better as a result. And the benefits they report, both human and financial, are impressive.

One consistent report from groups that operate this way is that so much improves – interactions become more engaging, focused, respectful, enlightening; meetings become more productive, shorter, enjoyable; better ideas come from more people and become the basis of measurably higher quality decisions and action—that they resent having to operate in less effective ways elsewhere. Meetings, discussions, dialogues run in the "old ways" seem more of a waste now than before because they contrast so starkly with the more effective ways engendered by the Thinking Environment. "I hate other meetings now," said one client, shaking his head. "I am not sure whether to thank you for that or blame you!" he said.

And this is why: life in a Thinking Environment is profoundly human.

If you worked in a Thinking Environment Organization, you would know as you walked in the door each morning that people would be interested in what you really think on issues big and small.

You would know that people throughout the organization would listen to you without interruption, and that you would do the same for them -- and learn unexpected, valuable things as a result.

You would know that everyone there would be good at asking and answering Incisive Questions, getting untrue limiting assumptions out of the way of people's thinking, and from that you would know the thrill of a liberated mind at work.

You would know that someone, many people even, would notice what is good about you and tell you; that genuine appreciation would, in fact, be oozing out of the walls, and problems would resolve well as a result.

You would know as you walked in the door that in every meeting you attended, there would be Rounds in which each person could think and speak on each item, and that the meetings would be energetic and fun -- and short.

You would know that as you spoke, you would not be interrupted, You would value that so much that you would take responsibility for being succinct so that everyone could have a full turn, too. You would know that the generative effect of these uninterrupted turns to think and speak would raise the energy of the group. You

would look forward to the pleasure of a work day with so much positive, not frenetic, energy.

You would know that agendas would be intelligently constructed to contain only essential items and that each item would engage your mind immediately because it would be written as a question, driving for a clearly articulated outcome. You would look forward to the stimulation of that and appreciate the respect for your mind that that agenda demonstrated.

And if you were to be a presenter that day, you would enjoy knowing that your carefully researched and constructed presentation would not be interrupted and that as a result people would absorb your points accurately and quickly. You would have enjoyed in the days of preparation having to exercise the discipline of producing only 5 slides each with 60% white space and the rest graphics, very few if any words. You would smile knowing that everyone at the meeting would be grateful to you for not producing brain death by Power Point.

You would know, as you walked in that door, that if you felt bad that day you could say so, even cry, and people would not wonder if you should be institutionalized. You would know, too, that if you felt good you could rejoice and people would not wonder what part of the big picture you had not seen yet.

You would know that complete and accurate information would be available to you, that your intellect would not be vandalized by information-withholding. You would know that, therefore, you would be able to think about things accurately and make better decisions.

You would know that periodically everyone at work would be asking themselves two questions:

1. What is in front of our face that we are not facing?
2. What do we know now we are going to find out in a year?

You would know that you and the organization would, therefore, not be caught in the jaws of denial.

You would know a lot about the various groups people identify with and they would know about yours. You would understand the untrue assumptions people make about groups, including the groups within the organization, and you would rest easy in everyone's determination, including your own, to eschew those assumptions and replace them with ones that dignify, reward, and depend on people's whole selves and real thinking.

You would know that if you made mistakes that day people would expect you to correct them, but they would not shame you or blame you. And you would understand the place of creative mistakes in the very evolution of life.

And for all these reasons you would be at ease inside; you would not be afraid.

And no longer afraid, you would dare to think for yourself again. You would dare to stand up. You would find your voice.

In organizations in which people truly value each other's thinking and truly listen to each other, targets get met better, budgets get set better, products and services get delivered better, the quality of work increases. But, more importantly, other things increase: things like self-respect, inspiration, innovation, confidence.

This is because when we know our thinking is valued, we know our very core is, too.

And in such an organization, you would get to the end of your day, close the door behind you, and be able to say to yourself,

"On my watch, people thrived. Here today no human heart was trampled, and no human mind was wasted."

A Thinking Environment Organization would be something like that. Something that demanding – and that good.