BRAINS
INSPIRING
BUSINESSES

FOR LEADERS

Edited by: Dr Paul Brown and Nandini Das Ghoshal
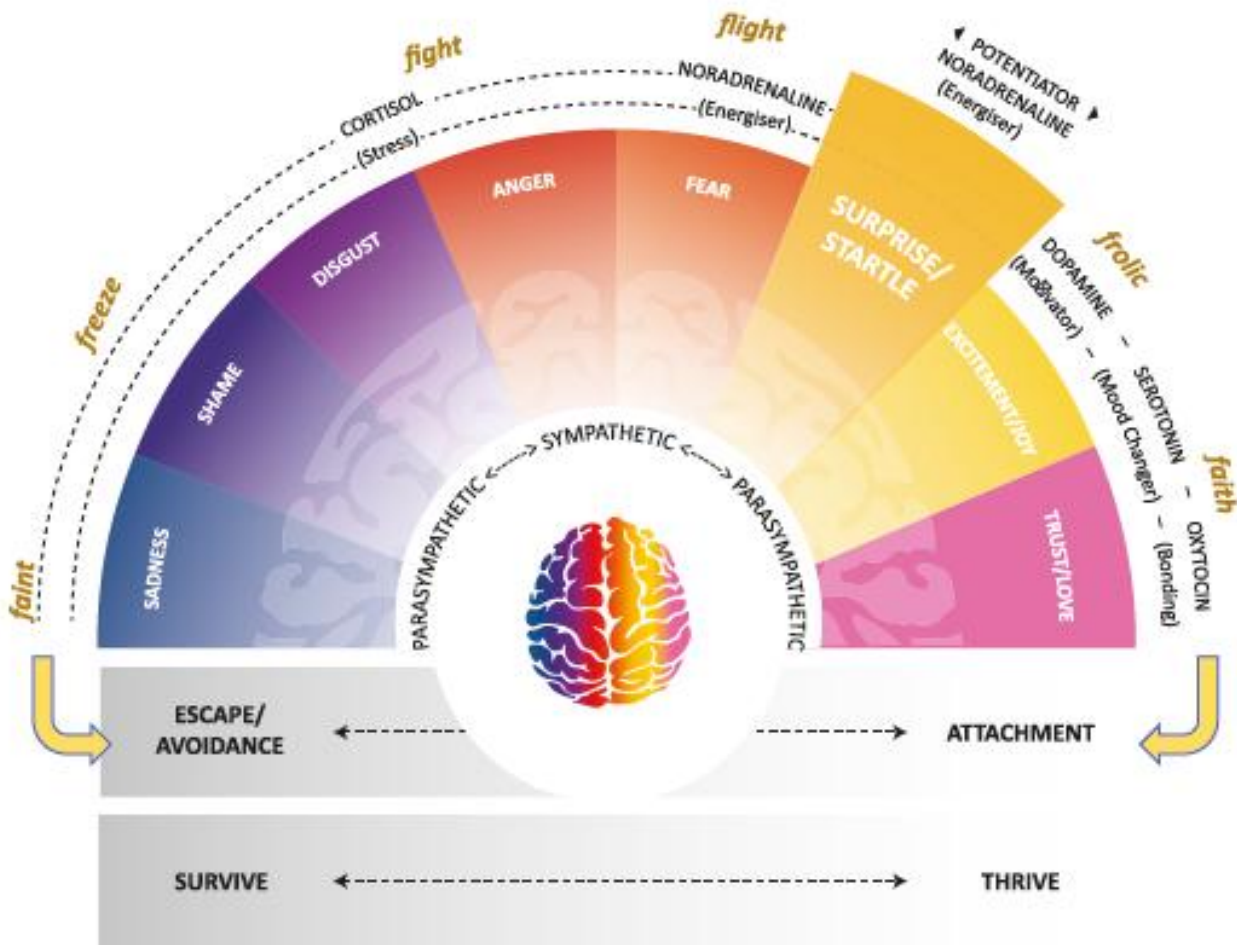
BRAINS INSPIRING BUSINESSES

Brown and Das Ghoshal

The 8 Basic Emotions

The London Protocol Of The Emotions
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BRAINS INSPIRING BUSINESSES

CHAPTER 9

The Welcoming
Organization:
being your true
Self at work

Khyati Kapai

From fear to freedom

I was having a conversation with Paul Brown about his co-authored book, *The Fear-Free Organization*, and asked him what a *fear-free* organization would be *full of* instead. He elaborated that a fear-free organization is where individuals would have the psychological freedom to bring their whole selves to work. So, when I asked him what he would call such an organization, after a 'generative pause'[1] in his thinking, he offered, 'The Welcoming Organization'.

Drawing on my executive coaching and facilitation experience, I share my thoughts here on what would make a 'Welcoming Organization'. I present it as a 'true and liberating alternative'[2] to the unsustainable working conditions of fear-based organizations. It seems that we are ready to replace the assumption of using fear as a performance motivator with a more accurate, sustainable and freeing alternative.

Fear-based organizations tap into survival instincts and basic human motivators such as fear, or emotions like anxiety that proximate to 'fear' to push employees to perform. Fear-based organizations are still prevalent.

In a coaching session with a client, we were reviewing feedback from her supervisor who had encouraged my client to use more fear with her team because the supervisor saw it as a powerful motivating tool. Where do we even begin in such a coaching situation? In some

[1] A generative pause relates to a finding in the Thinking Environment® that is described by Nancy Kline using the metaphor of waves and pauses: "The human mind seems to think in waves, and after a wave there is a pause. Inside the pause something almost Delphic happens that produces another wave of thinking." Notably, pauses in talking do not necessarily indicate pauses in thinking.

[2] The phrase, "true and liberating alternative", coined by Nancy Kline is a reference in the Thinking Environment to when an untrue limiting assumption is replaced with a true and liberating alternative in a breakthrough thinking process.

of the organizations I work with, employee engagement initiatives are data-driven versus being-driven: they are focused on measuring quantifiable indicators that apparently reflect the degree of employee engagement. In some cases, the frequency of these measurement exercises compounds the issue of poor employee experience because the focus is on measuring and reporting, which evokes a survival response. We cannot simply demand, measure and report performance. Instead, when the focus is on creating the conditions conducive for an attachment/ thrive response, then such circumstances automatically generate sustainable performance (Figure 9.1).
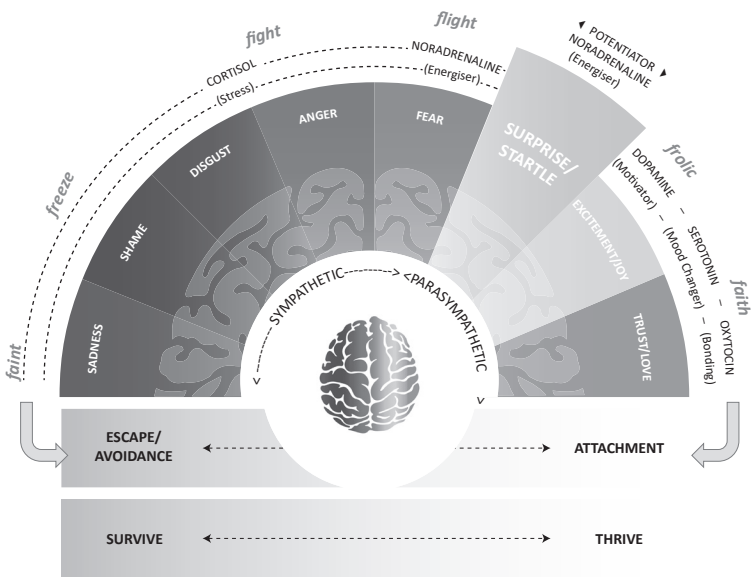
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see colour representation of this diagram on inside front and rear cover pages

Why psychological freedom?

In conversation, Dr Brown explained that individuals who can bring their whole selves to work enjoy psychological freedom and create psychological safety for Self[3] and others. Currently, because of a fear-based approach, many organizations are restricted to a concept of psychological safety that can create a victim mentality on the part of the individual employee – that is, where they believe that the responsibility for employee well-being is someone else's, not 'theirs' – in other words, someone else can be blamed for what is happening to 'me'. Instead, we need to embrace the concept of psychological freedom – the freedom to be wholly 'me' – which underpins the capacity to adapt appropriately and is the basis of resilience. From this all sorts of thrive-based feelings and actions can result, of which 'safety' may be only one.

Fast-tracked by the hybrid nature of work during the pandemic, we are witnessing a change in the psychological contract between employees and their organizations in which employees want the freedom of not just where and how they work but also ownership over *why* they work. I was first introduced to an evolution of organizations when reading Frederic Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations*. In writing that book, Laloux explored whether it was possible to structure and run organizations in entirely new, more life-giving ways. The book has inspired organizations to explore more soulful and purposeful management practices. In it, Laloux describes 'evolutionary purpose' as one of three breakthroughs of a 'teal' organization:

> … (such) organizations are seen as having a life
> and a sense of direction of their own. Instead

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[3] Self is capitalised throughout to convey an individual's idea of their 'true' self.

of trying to predict and control the future, members of the organization are invited to listen and understand what the organization is drawn to become, where it naturally wants to go (Laloux, 2016, p. 55).

Laloux's reference to such organizations as 'teal' is shorthand to typify the next phase of the development of organizational consciousness. It is contrasted with four organizational models that exist (impulsive, traditional, achievement and pluralist).

"Where it naturally wants to go" suggests to me where its members naturally want to go in flow with a sense of their true Self. Laloux outlines two other breakthroughs of teal organizations: *self-management* (powerful and fluid systems of distributed authority and collective intelligence) and *wholeness* (a reclamation of our inner wholeness whereby we bring all of whom we are to work).

In his book, Laloux provides examples of organizations that have adopted some teal-like breakthroughs – these include organizations like Morning Star and Buurtzorg[4]. The idea of wholeness has also appeared in the autobiographies of leaders such as Microsoft's CEO, Satya Nadella, and PepsiCo's former CEO, Indra Nooyi.

In Nadella's autobiography, *Hit Refresh*, we read:

It's about helping employees live out their own personal mission in the context of Microsoft's. Microsoft no longer employs people, people employ Microsoft… Anybody at Microsoft can look at our constellation of assets and dream of

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4 The purpose of an organization reflects its calling in the world. For example, the healthcare organization Buurtzorg's purpose is "for patients to live rich and autonomous lives". (Laloux, F. [2016] *Reinventing Organizations: An illustrated invitation to join the conversation on next-stage organizations*. Brussels: Nelson Parker.)

what can be and bring it to bear on any problem in any geography... This culture needs to be a microcosm of the world we hope to create outside the company. One where builders, makers, and creators achieve great things. But, equally important, one where every individual can be their best self... (Nadella, 2017, p. 241).

In her autobiography, *My Life in Full*, Nooyi writes:

"I had adopted a philosophy that people should be able to bring their whole selves to work. I see this as fundamental to inclusivity in any organization", (Nooyi, 2021, p.193) and "If we didn't let people bring their whole selves to work, we wouldn't get the best employees" (Nooyi, 2021, p. 205).

The idea of being ourselves at work may raise this concern: how will the contributions of employees who enjoy psychological freedom serve the overall organizational objectives?

Psychological freedom and self-regulation

In a way, what we really want to know is: 'How can I both be "me" and also "belong"?' Coincidentally, the 'we' in an organizational context can also serve as an acronym for 'welcoming everyone'. And breaking down 'belonging' into its compound components can help us understand the compatibility of Self and We: 'belonging' is made up of 'be' and 'longing' – that is, 'be-longing' contains a longing to be and to go along with.

We can rely on self-regulation because belonging supports our instincts to survive (feeling safe in numbers) and thrive (flourishing through quality of relationships). Individuals are unlikely to stay part of organizations if

this resonance is not there. Laloux observes that, when an interpersonal virus gets into the system (a person who feeds off the system, rather than contributes, and who absorbs energy rather than exchanging it), it can be excluded by a healthy system that seeks to repair the damage that has been done to it, as part of its natural capacity to do so. Like many biological functions, there is a circularity in the system that, functioning properly, reinforces itself (Laloux, as referenced in Brown and Lanz, 2020, pp. 131–132). According to Dr Brown, the employees are the cells of an organization, and the quality of relationships is the oxygen. According to Dr Siegel, a renowned psychiatrist and professor, energy and information flow throughout our human lives: that flow is regulated by the mind, shared in relationships, and passed through the embodied mechanisms of the nervous system and whole body that we are simply calling the 'brain'.

The following definitions[5] have been outlined by Dr Siegel:

- Energy: A term from physics that means the 'capacity to do something'. It comes in various forms, such as kinetic, thermal, nuclear, electrical and chemical. The nervous system functions by way of the flow of electrochemical energy.
- Information: Patterns of energy that carry meaning and 'stand for' or symbolize something other than the energy itself. Information is best considered a verb-like entity (not a noun) in that it gives rise to further processing in cascades of associations and linked meanings that emerge over time.

[5] Terminology source: Siegel, D. (2012) Pocket guide to interpersonal neurobiology: An integrative handbook of the mind. California: W.W. Norton & Company.

- Energy and information flow: The movement across time of energy and the swirls of energy that have symbolic value, that stand for something other than the pattern of energy flow alone. Energy and information can flow within the body (an embodied mechanism) and are transferred between people in relationships (sharing). The mind can be viewed as an emergent process that arises in the form of self-experience (subjectivity) and self-organization (regulation) as energy and information flow within and between people.

According to Dr Dan Siegel, becoming a part of a 'we' does not mean that you lose a 'me'. From an interpersonal neurobiology perspective, we work at promoting inner and interpersonal integration through the fundamental process of attuning to the internal subjective states of both Self and other that fill our lives with meaning and connection (Siegel, 2012, p. 19-8).

Paul Brown has observed that breaking down 'information' into its compound components 'in-formation' reveals that this dynamic information processing is in the service of forming our sense of Self. Given the conditions, we can positively integrate our brain's continuous management of information, energy, and relationship.

Creating the conditions of a Welcoming Organization – the Thinking Environment

We need to create the conditions in which individuals can continue to grow and flourish and enjoy 'inner and interpersonal integration'. The maturation of neural wiring in humans is not complete until approximately 24 years of age when the executive centres of the thinking brain come into their own (Bainbridge, 2008, as quoted in Brown et

al., 2015, p. 43). The implications of this are significant for the talent development initiatives of organizations, particularly those initiatives designed for young talent in their early twenties. A learning culture approach to organizational performance has been outlined by Nadella:

> It's about a dynamic learning culture. In fact, the phrase we use to describe our emerging culture is 'growth mindset', because it's about every individual, every one of us having that attitude – that mindset – of being able to overcome any constraint, stand up to any challenge, making it possible for us to grow and, thereby, for the company to grow.

> I told my colleagues that I was not talking bottom-line growth. I was talking about our individual growth. We will grow as a company if everyone, individually, grows in their roles and in their lives (Nadella, 2017, pp. 93–94).

This is evident in Microsoft's success during Nadella's tenure. When the best of each of us continues to develop and is free to function at our best, then the organization, in turn, benefits from higher-than-expected returns. So, we need to focus on creating the conditions that welcome self-regulated performance.

Once a case is made for such a Welcoming Organization, this then raises the question, 'What practices would such a Welcoming Organization embrace?'

There are many thought leaders, including those mentioned earlier, who share insights on 'welcoming' practices. As a Time to Think practitioner, my closest experience is of how the Thinking Environment can help us create practices that provide working conditions fit for

'humans being'. I have consistently felt and observed the experience of 'be-longing' in such an environment.

The Thinking Environment and its Ten Components are the work of Nancy Kline (see Table 9.1). Her ongoing discoveries[6] over more than 35 years, in collaboration with her colleagues worldwide, have been about how we can create the conditions for individuals to think well *for* themselves. During her time at a Quaker school that she co-founded, Kline discovered that 'the most important factor in determining whether students could think for themselves, afresh, at any given moment, seemed to be how they were being treated by the people with them while they were thinking'. Eventually, the essential behaviours that helped people to think for themselves became clearer. Ten ways of being together have been identified thus far, specifically focused on how we treat one another. The Ten Components of a Thinking Environment refer to the conditions that manifest as behaviours and appear to consistently contribute to helping people think well for themselves. These ten components are Attention, Equality, Ease, Appreciation, Encouragement, Feelings, Information, Difference, Incisive Questions™ and Place.

Table 9.1 The Ten Components of a Thinking Environment

ATTENTION
Listening without interruption and with interest in where the person will go next in their thinking
EQUALITY
Regarding each other as thinking peers, giving equal time to think

[6] Kline encourages "a love for discovery that is marginally more than the love for the discoveries".

EASE
Discarding internal urgency

APPRECIATION
Noticing what is good and saying it

FEELINGS
Welcoming the release of emotion

ENCOURAGEMENT
Giving courage to go to the unexplored edge
of thinking by ceasing competition as thinkers

INFORMATION
Absorbing all the relevant facts

DIFFERENCE
Prioritizing diversity of group identities and
understanding their lived experience

INCISIVE QUESTIONS
Freeing the human mind of untrue
assumptions lived as true

PLACE
Producing a physical environment – the room, the
listener, your body – that says, 'You matter'

Kline, N. (2022) Available at: https://www.timetothink.
com/thinking-environment/the-ten-components

Kline (2020) describes the Ten Components as "Nature
at work. I think the human mind is looking for them all

of the time". Any organizational culture can exhibit and embrace these behaviours to allow individual and corporate values to come to life. These behavioural components are actionable: we can offer generative attention, instil equality, restore ease, foster appreciation, provide encouragement, welcome feelings, absorb information, cultivate differences, craft incisive questions and establish place. They can be described distinctly yet are integral to one another. From my experience in introducing the Thinking Environment in organizations, the far-reaching effects of the Ten Components are often underestimated and even resisted because of their simplicity. Yet, it's a simplicity that sits on the far side of complexity.[7] And the principle of Occam's razor reminds us that the simplest proposition that requires the fewest assumptions is the most likely to be correct. One of my course participants, Natasha Dalmia, systems thinker and coach, observed that the components are Gestalt in nature, referring to an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts.

An applied neuroscience (brain and behaviour) perspective supports Kline's ongoing observations and understanding that these ten behaviours not only work – they work every time. The reason for this dependable quality of thinking is that generative attention, uncorrupted and sustained, calms the amygdala, the emotional 'control centre' of the brain, making it possible for 'approach or attachment' hormones like serotonin and oxytocin to flow. These hormones then 'bathe' the cortex, the cognitive 'control centre' of the brain, allowing a perfect interplay between these hormones and cognition. And, because the

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[7] Oliver Johnston observed that "the thinking environment holds the kind of simplicity that is to be found on the far side of complexity" (Kline, 2020, p. 117).

listener's attention doesn't waver, and we know it won't waver, the amygdala stays calm and thought-disturbing hormones like cortisol and adrenaline stay at bay (Brown as quoted in Kline, 2020, pp. 33–34). The bedrock practice that a Thinking Environment is built on is the promise of non-interruption in both its verbal and non-verbal nature. In fact, Kline concludes that the very first minute one of us in stark disagreement interrupts the other, the brain registers the interruption as a physical assault. Immediately, the brain hormones of adrenaline and cortisol bathe the cortex, the very centre of our thinking; the amygdala, dictator of feelings, instantly dispatches the triumvirate actions of freezing, fleeing, fighting. And, presto, we disconnect. Our thinking shrivels. And polarisation is born (Kline, 2020, p. 10). Laloux also mentions non-interruption in his ground rules for wholeness (Laloux, 2021).

The Thinking Environment can foster a whole way of organizational life in which individuals can go further in their thinking, recognizing the diverse convocation of lives that come together to form an organization. It creates the potential for individuals to grow into their best selves and employ the organizational context to pursue their individual passions while producing outcomes that reward the organization for creating such an environment; and so, the virtuous cycle continues. When people can be themselves, they have capacity for growth and development. In a conversation with Nancy Kline about this chapter, she shared that it's striking how many organizations say they have their values, the 'what', but they do not have the 'how'.

I think the Ten Components allow values to be lived. I don't see it as the culture of an organization but its consciousness, which has the power to cultivate an

organizational culture and arrangements based on the widest possible welcome for one's whole and true sense of Self. I have observed and experienced that the Ten Components, when activated as a system, both harmonize the freedom enjoyed by individuals and commit them interpersonally through self-regulation.

In addition, the Thinking Environment provides liberating structures for all aspects of organizational activity to bring the Ten Components to life. In application, as further explained below in Table 9.2, the practical building blocks of Rounds, Thinking Pairs, Dialogue and Open Discussion support everyday conversations. Fuller applications support the way we problem solve (Time to Think Council[8]), hold meetings (Transforming Meetings), mediate (Timed Talk), interview, mentor and coach (Thinking Partnerships/Thinking Sessions).

All the building blocks and applications described below are held by the Ten Components, which is what allows them to create the conditions of a Thinking Environment. When the components are weak or missing, these approaches are not as liberating and may even be experienced as rules. With the support of the components, further bespoke applications can be developed for organizational life. At the same time, the components alone are sufficient to allow moment-to-moment interactions to flow.

Table 9.2 The building blocks and applications
of a Thinking Environment

THINKING PAIR
A Thinking Pair refers to equal turns for two people to think for themselves about topics of their individual choices. There is no dialogue or comment on each other's turn unless requested by the thinker.

[8] Conceptualised by Nancy Kline in collaboration with Scott Farnsworth.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue at its best is not two people talking, it is two people thinking. Good dialogue could be described as thinking on the same topic with short, frequent, roughly equal turns back and forth as well as all the discipline of a Thinking Pair. Dialogue has a generative impact on independent thinking rather than making shared thinking explicit. In this way, it supports psychological freedom in an interdependent context.

ROUNDS

Rounds are a way of getting everyone thinking. A question is decided that people will be addressing in the round. The direction of the round (clockwise, counter-clockwise) is determined. A volunteer begins the round. No one speaks again until the round is completed.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Anyone can speak next in no particular order but without interruption and taking roughly equal turns. No one raises their hands to be put in a 'queue' of next speakers (in itself an interruption) and no one 'tailgates' the speaker.

TRANSFORMING MEETINGS

Transforming Meetings applies the Ten Components specifically through the Building Block Applications (of Thinking Pairs, Dialogue, Rounds and Open Discussion) to agenda items that are in the form of a question that focuses on the desired outcome from discussion of that item.

TIME TO THINK COUNCIL
The Time to Think Council allows for the wisdom of
the group to make its ways non-intrusively into the
problem-solving of one person. Each council member
speaks in the language of experience and knowledge,
not in the language of advice. The Presenter can access
the knowledge, experience and information of colleagues
without being told what to think.

TIMED TALK
This involves setting a timer and taking as
many equal uninterrupted turns talking as
necessary to resolve the issue.

MENTORING
Mentoring in a Thinking Environment has one goal:
the independent thinking of the Mentee. This goal sets
it apart from other mentoring models that rely heavily
(and often unawarely) on advice and direction from the
Mentor. The Mentoring Session begins with a Thinking
Partnership Session for the Mentee. The Mentee is
assured of uninterrupted Attention followed by 'incisive
questions' to do their own thinking on a topic of their
choice. This Session is then followed by the Interview,
a period of questions from Mentee to Mentor.
The questions draw out life experience and knowledge
from the Mentor that can both enrich the way
the Mentee sees a situation and adds to their insights
and framing of ways forward on their topic. However,
this contribution from the Mentor is specifically not
worded as advice so that the Mentee can continue to do
their own thinking, come to their own conclusions and
understanding, and agree to take responsibility for their

own decisions and outcomes. Following the interview, the Mentee offers a Thinking Session to the Mentor. The expressly Mentee-focused aspect of the Mentoring process produces sustained confidence and self-esteem in the Mentee as well as successful problem-solving and achieving of goals. The Thinking Environment Mentoring Process communicates, in its very structure, genuine respect for the Mentee, and offers productive and often inspiring opportunity and time to think.

THINKING SESSION

A Thinking Session is a longer Thinking Pair during which more can happen including the building on assumptions and the possibility of exploring an incisive question. The process works well because it is grounded in the purpose of igniting independent thinking based on the principle that people make the most progress when they are self-motivated, autonomous and can feel respect from others.

PRESENTATION

The key skill for presentations is connection with the audience that determines the level of thinking the audience can do while the presenter speaks. A presenter thinks of the audience as a Thinking Partner, allowing their attention to encourage them. The use of slides involves a careful consideration of providing only supplementary and illustrative input without compromising the connection between the group and the presenter.

INTERVIEWS

The outcome is to elicit the best thinking from the interviewee and to create a liberating, not directive, experience for them through an embodiment of the Ten Components by the interviewer. The opening includes an invitation to share any questions or concerns about the interview. Note-taking is only after the interviewee has finished answering the question, and the interviewer shares who will read the notes and their use of them. The interviewer ends with an appreciation of a quality noticed in the interviewee.

DIVERSITY PROCESS

The component of difference includes both diversity of group identity and diversity of ideas. When we don't value each other's identity differences, we don't value our divergent thinking. The process explores ways to remove the blocks to pride in our diversity, so that we can think together – all of us – as ourselves. Participants learn about the place of assumptions in the creation and maintenance of our individual and group identities; and how to build incisive questions to replace untrue limiting assumptions about our individual and group identities with true and liberating ones, helping us to think better when working with each other. With the skill of building incisive questions and the Thinking Environment in general, the thinker can process well the limiting assumptions that surface and can create a very different life without them.

Source: Adapted from materials created by Nancy Kline,
Time to Think Ltd.

These approaches overlap, and can be combined, with the insights of other thought leaders. For example, Laloux describes an empty chair practice whereby, in meetings, an empty chair is included that represents the organization and its purpose (Laloux, 2016, p. 123). By listening to themselves becoming the voice of the organization, employees can sense the interests of the organization by reflecting on questions such as whether the discussion and decisions serve the organization well.

Does the Thinking Environment work?

I propose that the Thinking Environment could be a blueprint for a Welcoming Organization based on how the future of work is evolving. Four organizational needs appear to be emerging:

1. Navigating work and work environments remotely requires even greater confidence in independent thinking because employees cannot rely solely on traditional avenues of on-the-job in-person induction, training, collaboration and networking, communication and relationship management.

2. Navigating work and the work environment remotely requires a renewed way of connecting with others that maintains a sense of belonging and inclusivity despite physical distancing.

3. With a psychological contract that balances the power between employer and employee, organizational environments will need to shift towards welcoming the whole Self of an employee (thoughts, feelings, personal aspirations, needs and preferred ways of working). However, this also leads to an integration challenge in the world of work. As we find more meaning in our work, and exercise more flexibility

in how we work, the boundaries between different aspects of our lives are blurring and we need a widely understood compass that helps create what I call 'integration margins' to prevent employees feeling overwhelmed and burnt out. Integration margins would help us create margins or spaces in our increasingly integrated lives to realign with Self.

4. Navigating organizational contexts from one acronym to the next (from VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous to BANI – brittle, anxious, nonlinear, incomprehensible[9] to the next hopefully more positive acronym: WISER [see below]) will require an approach to organizational life that is not only discovery-based by nature but also open to exploration, and the organic emergence of an organizational culture and consciousness, based on the ongoing observations and experiences of those involved.

WISER is an acronym I have coined that stands for 'Welcoming, Integrated, Simplified, Easeful and Responsive'. It attempts to describe a positive experience of the dynamic integration of energy, information and relationships at both an individual and interpersonal level. In such a case, individuals would experience a welcome of Self resulting from an integrated flow of energy, information and relationships. I think this requires a simplifying of information exchange, processes, structures, number of relationships and systemic demands to facilitate this integration. Ease and space would create the conditions for us to evolve in our capacity to sense the subtleties of relationships and our environment, allowing us to respond continuously and optimally in a learning loop.

[9] VUCA appears to have been first used in 1987, drawing on the leadership theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus. BANI is credited to American anthropologist, author and futurist, Jamais Cascio.

From my observations and experience of the Thinking Environment, it does support and create the space for independent thinking, self-awareness and coming to terms with oneself. I have consistently observed genuine humility that I believe is inculcated when individuals have a true sense of equality and allow themselves to experience something greater than themselves. Thinking Environment practitioners also strive to embrace the practice of discovery alongside their discoveries to date, reiterating Laloux's 'sense and respond' approach that is crucial to sustained organizational performance.

A look at the impact of the Thinking Environment on organizational life suggests that sustaining such an approach would support these emerging contexts.

Rebecca Timmins, Head of Operations at Emery Little and Time to Think practitioner, describes how, in team meetings conducted within a Thinking Environment, participants often examine assumptions that might be holding them back. They sometimes go as far as creating a specific incisive question but, more often, examining assumptions alone causes a shift that unlocks new potential. Box 9.1 describes a team meeting at Emery Little.

Box 9.1 Transforming meetings at Emery Little

As an example, Timmins described a team meeting to advance a quarterly goal set by the leadership team: "This new process needs to be business-as-usual by the end of the quarter." It was considered a big goal involving how client money was looked after and how clients were charged. They had some of the collateral ready to go, which included scripts and training for the financial planners and templates for two key documents that were in testing, but that was about it. They needed to create, train and

embed a process, and quickly. And they felt totally stuck in their thinking because it just felt too big to make any progress on.

Then Rebecca asked, "What are we assuming that is keeping us stuck?" and the assumptions rolled in round after round. The team concluded that they were assuming they had to get it right, maybe even perfect, before they could take it to the wider team. They dismissed this as untrue and replaced it with: "Not only do they know better than us anyway, and need to be involved, but one of our core values is "progress" as in "progress, not perfection". So their incisive question was, "If we knew that we needed progress, not perfection, what would we do?" And the ideas came thick and fast.

Nine months later, they were 75% through the project. Clients were receiving a better service than ever and paying more for it. And the team was more engaged and committed than ever. The systems and processes were clearer and more efficient than ever before. Progress over perfection has become their normal, so they know they're not done, but every single person is committed to constant improvement.

Source: Produced with the kind permission of When
We Think and Emery Little

Other research initiatives also support the positive impact of the Thinking Environment on organizational life. Emily Havers, who certified as a Time to Think consultant, conducted research into the effectiveness of the Transforming Meetings Programme (Havers, 2009). In her research on how meetings in a Thinking Environment have an impact on organizational life, she interviewed 15 senior officers from 11 organizations across 3 continents and found 95% consistency in the outcomes of meetings

held in a Thinking Environment. In particular, her research findings suggest that these meetings time and again:

- produced a measurable, positive impact on the performance indicators of organizations;
- 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 more involvement from everyone; and
- fostered productive working relationships.

A 2007 research initiative by Beverly Whitehead, an organizational psychologist and coaching practitioner, researched the effectiveness of the Time to Think mentoring programme involving 16 mentoring pairs in South Africa over 6 months. In her research, most participants reported that the programme:

- balanced the voices in the organization;
- increased respect for each other; and
- developed interpersonal skills.

And that, through it, people:

- shared knowledge and experience;
- generated good thinking, ideas and innovation;
- solved work problems; and
- resolved inner conflicts relating to self or career.

One of my participants, the head of a business line for a listed company, appreciated his Thinking Environment course experience by concluding that it is not the nature of the challenge that makes it difficult to think about our business problems, but the *way* we think about them.

Because the practical applications of a Thinking Environment are grounded in the Ten Components, they can be embedded pervasively in an organization and its

everyday work practices rather than appearing as bursts of add-ons that we sometimes observe in the case of an event-based approach to diversity, inclusion and belonging. This is because the Thinking Environment is a way of being: all the components, including appreciation, difference-in-action and equality, are cultivated and embodied in every interaction. And such an environment need not be restricted to for-profit organizations.

The resulting paradigm shifts

Individuals come together to create an organization. As more individuals within an organization practise these ways of being in terms of the Ten Components, organizations can expect to observe the following behavioural shifts from:

- urgency to ease;
- feedback to appreciation;
- time management to attention and energy 'flowment' (a term I have coined to refer to our ability to generate and sustain a flow of energy in ourselves and those around us as we act in the service of truly human organizational goals that reflect conscientiousness for all stakeholders);
- competitive thinking to encouraging and championing independent cutting-edge thinking;[10] and
- too much information all the time to just enough information when needed.

And more expansive shifts including:

- expanding the notion of place to encompass internal place (Self) and external place (a physical and a

[10] Thinking independently is one of the four Paths described in Time to Think practitioner, Nick Chatrath's book *The Threshold: Leading in the Age of AI* which is dedicated to describing threshold leadership in the coming AI context. According to Chatrath, the four pathways (Cultivating Stillness, Thinking Independently, Embodying Intelligence and Maturing Consciousness) offer a way of being to progress in leading in the age of AI.

digital environment) to make everyone feel that they matter;

• acknowledging the mix of feelings and well-being that drive thoughts and behaviour, and recognizing that the treatment for well-being is 'treating others well to be';

• embodying and embedding difference and equality in organizational culture (that is, diversity and inclusion in action that allows for our humanness to transcend our social constructs and contexts); and

• expanding the notion of productivity to include the quality thinking that precedes activity.

In essence, workplace conditions and arrangements would be designed in human versus process terms, thereby creating sustainable organizations. The sustainability stems from the interplay of the Ten Components. For instance, equality and information harmonize difference; ease and place support both attention and encouragement to get things done without burnout.

Kline highlights the relationship between Self and organization as follows:

> In a thinking organization these Ten Components flow continuously through the individuals and the organization. Both thrive only if the Thinking Environment is reciprocal between them. This kind of reciprocity should be part of our definition of equality. Each of us matters but what we create matters too, and how we treat our creation determines how it will treat us. We depend on each other. We are both. (Kline, 1999, p. 140)

The behaviours and activities of individuals create an 'Organizational Self', a term I'm using to refer to an organization's essential being. The Organizational Self, in

turn, creates the conditions for individuals to thrive (or not). And, like the working mind, the organization also seems to do this by integrating energy, information and relationships. The way the organization triangulates these three can be described as its *culture* ('the way we do things around here', especially as observed in the examples set by those enjoying positional hierarchy). The ends towards which the organization triangulates these three can be described as its *purpose*. The operating context in which the organization triangulates these three describes its *mission*. And the outcomes and means to accomplishing this triangulation can be described as its *vision* broken down into strategy and then operations. In these ways, the organization starts creating an identity for itself that differentiates it from others – namely, how individuals cooperate internally and how the organization competes or collaborates externally. And organizational performance, like individual performance, depends on how healthy the system is.

An individual's perception of this Organizational Self (how welcome they feel by it) determines whether they consider a particular organization worth giving of themselves (their Self) to. For individuals, the more positive the triangulation at the individual and organizational level, the more integrated their experience at work (and vice versa) as individuals see their own purpose in the shared purpose of the organization. Organizations successful at this integration, both internally and externally, would be committed to stakeholder consciousness rather than just shareholder capitalism. This would support the creation of a WISER[11] reality, which, in turn, the organization would benefit from. And I think what underpins the functioning of all this is 'generative flow'.

[11] Refers to the WISER acronym described earlier of 'welcoming, integrated, simplified, easeful and responsive'.

Generative flow

> Human resources are like natural resources:
> they're often buried beneath the surface and
> you have to make an effort to find them

> – Ken Robinson, TED Talk, 2010[12]

In conversation, Paul Brown explains that developments in neuroscience are confirming that we are primarily energy systems, and that our individual psychology comes from the way our brain is both shaped by and responds to the emotionally driven energy flowing through it. This energy-in-motion is profoundly 'e-motional' because it is emotions generating feelings that are attached to the stimuli of experience in the shaping of the individuality of the brain. And then language, via the cognitive system, begins to represent the emotionally signified experience to us, and from us to others, and so gives us an account of what our brain already knows. Modern neuroscience has shown us that, at any moment in time, through its emotional system, the brain has prepared itself and the rest of the body for action well in advance of that preparedness coming into conscious awareness. The brain can organize itself for action within 85 milliseconds. Awareness does not arise until 250 milliseconds (Brown and Dzendrowskyj, 2018).

From my experience, the Thinking Environment offers:
1. the widest welcome for the flow of our emotions; and
2. the least interruption of thoughts flowing into conscious awareness.

This is valuable because cognitive performance and brilliance are generated from the intelligence of emotions – that is, having an acute awareness of our e-motional

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[12]https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_learning_revolution/transcript

experiences and thoughts, and the language[13] to describe the subtlety of those experiences.

Most importantly, how can we create the conditions for people to see themselves and things 'truthfully'?

You are welcome

One of my course participants, and co-contributor to this book, Nandini Das Ghoshal, executive and life coach, and co-founder of *The Story of Me*, coined a phrase for what she experienced in the Thinking Environment as 'the Uninterrupted Me'. I feel this phrase captures the essence of who we can be in the context of a Welcoming Organization.

I think the following describes the experience of the Uninterrupted Me in terms of the psychological freedoms[14] one would enjoy in a Welcoming Organization built on Thinking Environment principles that would allow us to see ourselves and things more truthfully:

1. I would have access to uninterrupted time to think alone and in the presence of someone's generative attention.[15]

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[13] I think eloquence may be a "thinking enhancer" (term coined by Nancy Kline). Insights can be hard to express in language, but our lived experience of them makes them real for us. Some deep insights and experiences are ineffable for us because they challenge our limits of linguistic expression that would allow us to fully grasp them and extract meaning from them. The more an individual has the conceptual and linguistic precision to articulate an insight, the more clarity it holds for the individual. We are elated during an insight when we can ascribe apt words to that combination of feeling and thought that is arising within us. Those specific words resonate with us and are compelling for us. In this way, insights are personal in both substance and expression.

[14] These psychological freedoms contain expressions coined by Nancy Kline in the Thinking Environment.

[15] In the book, *You're Not Listening*, the author, Kate Murphy, has detailed the value of "the voluble inner voice" by sharing research-based insights into the importance of listening to yourself. Murphy includes a quote by physicist and Nobel Prize winner, Richard Feynman, who wrote in his book of essays, *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*: "By trying to put the

2. I would have relevant information when needed to be able to do my best thinking.
3. I would not receive unsolicited advice.
4. I would be able to unlock my thinking from untrue assumptions that I've been living (with) as true.
5. I would be able to dismantle denial by facing what needs facing.
6. I would be encouraged to go further in my thinking.
7. I would be able to discard competitive thinking.
8. I would be able to absorb difference-in-action to think outside the constructs of identities.
9. I would be able to appreciate myself and others by looking for, noticing and acknowledging what is good.
10. I would be able sufficiently to release and restore my sense of well-being.

This may raise the concern, *"*How can an environment that allows me to be me also create the conditions for me to bring my best Self to work?"

In the TED talk series, *How to Be a Better Human*, Herminia Ibarra, the Charles Handy Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the London Business School, reminds us that whatever made us successful in the past may not make us successful going forward and might even get in the way. She explains that what's tricky about career transition points is not that the new skills are hard to learn – it's that the old ones have become core to our sense of who we are, our identity. As a result, not sticking with them feels like we are somehow being inauthentic and so we get stuck by staying with them (Ibarra, 2021).

To overcome the 'authenticity paradox' and embrace an 'adaptively authentic' way of being, concepts coined by

points of view that we have in our head together and comparing one to the other, we make some progress in understanding and appreciating where we are and what we are."

Ibarra (Ibarra, 2015), I have found Thinking Partnerships/ Sessions to be valuable. To develop a new way of thinking about ourselves, we need to come to terms with the underlying assumptions that are driving our existing behaviours so that we can change our perception of Self and life.

When you do things from your Soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

– Rumi[16]

In a way, a Thinking Session unlocks one's confidence to be the best version of one's Self. This seems to be supported by findings explained by Ian Robertson in his 2021 book, *How Confidence Works: The new science of self-belief.* Unravelling the win of the British Open by golfer Padraig Harrington, Robertson describes the creation of a mental zone in which his attention was focused on a specific goal within a circle of control. Fuelling a turnaround, Harrington's caddy, Ronan Flood, offered the golfer words that allowed only memories linked to past successes with chipping and putting to come out of his memory banks. This "focused Harrington's attention into an almost trance-like state on this tiny hinterland of behaviour". Describing attention as a psychological regulator, Robertson highlights the powerful duo of attention and confidence with words being potent orchestrators of them. This amplifies the value of a Thinking Session in which all the 'content' is thinker-generated so the focus is on words that carry full context and significance for the thinker.[17]

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[16] Source: Jeffrey Douglass (2008) *Living from your soul*, p. 45. Eustis, Florida: SPS Publications.

[17] I have a memorable experience of the significance of our words from a Thinking Session in which my outcome was: "I want to feel less challenged *by* this relationship." My Thinking Partner-in-training replayed my outcome as "... feel less challenged *in* the relationship", following which I felt and articulated a defensiveness that I had already made progress in

And the Thinking Partner offers valuable continuous attention: a psychological generator. The quality of an incisive question, offered as many times as it generates productive thinking, focuses one's thoughts on liberating possibilities within a circle of control or influence, thereby creating the necessary shift in emotions and thoughts. As Robertson describes, by allowing one to pay attention to the right things, you do them better, which in turn makes you more confident, which then makes you do them even better, and so on.

In a Thinking Session, the Uninterrupted Me can unleash a built-in confidence booster by deciding which personal truths can be dismissed, replaced and embedded in exploring new possibilities for the 'aspirational Self'. And when a session surfaces "bedrock assumptions about self or life" (Kline, 1999), it has a liberating effect on many aspects of life. This breakthrough process allows the thinker to rewrite (rewire) their "plot" through a shift in feelings. For me, assumptions seem to be part of the brain's working language for adaptation. It is interesting to observe and experience how assumptions that were liberating in a past context can be limiting in a current context, but this needs an opportunity to come up into our consciousness. From a coaching perspective, it is a very efficacious partnering expertise because the thinker journeys independently through the derivative of a biographical inquiry (examination of assumptions) but with a feedforward focus (moving towards the accomplishment of outcomes).

This practice has revived the word 'empowerment' for me – a word that in some contexts has been understood as giving power to others. An applied neuroscience

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creating a distance in the relationship, so I no longer identified with being *in* it but still felt challenged *by* it.

perspective reveals what true empowerment would be. We each have a brain with the capacity – and inclination – to act in our best interests in terms of self-preservation and adaptation. At any point in time, although only within the framework and perhaps limitations of its own experience, our brain is causing us to act adaptively in a way that it has determined is in our best interests. We may make mistakes and regret our actions but that is a consequence of hindsight and reflection because we have moved on.[18] As we are reminded in the novel, *Midnight Library*, by Matt Haig, "the only way to learn is to live". Humanistic ideas of self-authoring and self-actualisation are in line with the Thinking Environment's commitment to empowerment by igniting independent thinking that allows for individuals to unleash the 'all-knowing' already within their system.

After taking participants through a Thinking Session exercise, one shared with the group*:* "After today, I'll never be lonely again, because I'll always have another me." This response reveals 'unstuck' and psychological freedom. Other participants have described their experience of the Thinking Environment as "wholesome", "soulful", "feeling true to myself" and "one of the few places in the world where others allow me to be me, and I allow myself to be me". This reinforces a discovery by Nancy Kline that "we can think *for* ourselves only if we can think *as* ourselves".

From freedom to fulfilment

Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth."

– Kahlil Gibran

In the beginning of this chapter, I shared a conversation that Paul Brown and I had on coming up with a title for this

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[18] Heraclitus's insight that one can never step twice in the same river for neither the person nor the river is the same in time and space.

chapter. That was not the whole conversation because I had shared another idea for the title. I had been reading the book, *The Molecule of More*, by Lieberman and Long (2018), and learned of anandamide, which is an endocannabinoid (part of a collection of neurotransmitters they refer to as the 'Here and Now' molecules) and is named after a Sanskrit word that means joy, bliss and delight. Attracted to this description of a state where we could experience enough contentment with ourselves and our conditions, I had shared the possibility of a "Blissful Organization" with Dr Brown. He had replied, "We're not there yet." And after a generative pause in his thinking, he added, "But how lovely it would be. The idea that we could finish a day of work and, when asked how our day was, be able to reply, "It was blissful."

For organizations, perhaps the invitation is to cultivate a shift from fear to freedom and ultimately to fulfilment where, in bringing the best of our Self, we can experience the best of being human. As described in the London Protocol of the Emotions (see inside front cover), we can start experiencing our growing trust in Self and others as 'faith'. In terms of our evolution, it can be seen as expanding from surviving to thriving and, finally, to arriving.

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

– T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *The Four Quartets*, 1941.

As we invite in the Thinking Environment, "What do you think, or feel or want to say?"

I welcome you and your discovery of Self.

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Biography

Khyati Kapai is the Founder of Yzer Solutions Pte Ltd (pronounced 'wiser'), a learning and development consultancy. Khyati has been teaching, facilitating, and coaching since 2001. Khyati is also a Faculty Member of Time to Think Ltd, offering courses in the Thinking Environment and supporting organizations in creating its conditions. Khyati has worked internationally supporting clients from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds including investment bankers in Shanghai, engineers in Singapore, ministry officials in Cambodia, and luxury retailers in Europe. Clients choose to work with Khyati for her rich thinking interventions and evidence-informed approach to learning and behavioural shifts.

Before moving to the talent development industry, Khyati worked in Hong Kong as a Financial Analyst for Citigroup and as an Auditor for Deloitte & Touche. She is based in Singapore and grew up in Hong Kong.

"To remain competitive, we must learn how to use all of the brains available to us as optimally as possible. This book presents an evidenced overview of the state of the art in this field "

Prof Nicholas Harrison, PhD FRSC FintP, Professor of Advanced Materials Discovery, Imperial College London

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Dr. Saba Hasanie, DProf, MBA, PCC, CMC, Managing Director and Senior Partner, OSC Leadership Development

This book brings together the insights and experiences from experienced executive coaches who all hold to the central thinking around the power of emotions and energy and their critical roles in our decision-making and approach to managing relationships and work culture.

Edited by Dr Paul Brown, an acclaimed professor of Applied Neuroscience, with his colleague Nandini Das Ghoshal, the book references Dr Brown's 'London Protocol of the Emotions' framework, which links the core 'primary' emotions to six emotional reaction and the allied roles of neurochemicals cortisol, noradrenaline, dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin into a single framework.

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