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**Notes from “Thinking Environment” Meeting. 28th March 2023. Sophie Stephenson**

*Meetings are groups of people where change happens.*

**Key message from this meeting**: get clear on your outcomes. Use issue, outcome, question.

Spend time thinking about what the outcome we want from the meeting. What is it we most need to achieve?

If you can’t work out outcome (this is hard), go back a step to issues. You can then prioritise.

*Replace items with questions.* What is the question you want people to think about?

**Time wasted in meetings from:**

* Unstructured agenda
* No structure to people contributing
* Repetition of ideas

**Groups are tricky:**

* Social loafing: some people will say more and therefore others will step back. Some people know that they will never be asked to contribute so they don’t engage.
* Production blocking: a couple of people doing all the talking. So don’t get to hear from the group.
* Evaluation apprehension: As soon as we are in any group we have a radar for the cultural norms – what’s ok, who is valued. We don’t want to look stupid, uncertain or different. We scan for safety when we enter a room. If dominant norm in group in white and male, and I am not, my apprehension will go up. Thinking inhibitor as people try to think in ‘acceptable’ ways.
* Blinded by peer influence: as soon as someone speaks we tend to start mirroring. So over time you get convergence of ideas. The worst thing that the person with influence can do is share their thoughts first.

**What conditions do we need as people to do our best thinking.** They can be internal to us or externally provided by others. When conditions are there, everyone thinks better.

Ten conditions (here are a few)

1. Attention. Listen and not interrupt. Because of that we need everyone to be succinct.
2. Equality. Do we value each other’s contribution equally.
3. Ease. Allow some stillness. 30 seconds at the start. STOP. Settle. Take a breath. Observe how you feel. Pause or permission. Creates space before we begin. Needed for creativity.
4. Appreciation. We forget to focus on what we are doing really well. We think better in the context of appreciation. We are more likely to challenge and constrictively argue. Share something that is going really well. Context feels more positive.

Most people interrupt because they don’t know when they will get a chance to contribute. As soon as you say everyone will get a chance, this is likely to stop.

Name things to help everyone contribute equally. “We have got 20 minutes, there are 6 of us and so we have three minutes each.”

Giving people a minute to think about what they want to say and write it down, helps them hold on to their thoughts when the talking starts.

Some people are going to need discussion to feel engaged in the meeting and think well, others will need to prepare in advance. Consider if you need to send pre-reading. However, everyone is busy with short attention spans. Think - What would make you read it? RAG rate? Short video? Start with headlines and links in pre-email.

**Trying to do too much?**

Wildly overambitious over what we can achieve in a meeting.

Say meeting is one hour. 6 people in a meeting. 1 agenda item – at best each of you has 10 minutes, If 2 agenda items – 5 minutes at best. That is without facilitation time.

For every hour of meeting, you need an hour to prepare.

**Tips when starting:**

This is going to feel different to another meeting. I am going to make sure everyone going to contribute.

Early on do a round. Everyone has a chance to speak. Establishes equality, sets tone of non-interruption.

Start with something personal that people won’t want to interrupt. “What made you smile this week?”.

Model the environment. Model Ease. Welcoming people. Saying their names as they come in.

You can take it one step at a time. Just start by changing issues to agenda questions. Or just start with a round.