**Using the Thinking Environment® for Smarter Meetings**Summary of MBC Insight sessions on 12 September 2022 led by Katie Driver, Thinking Alliance

**Why do we need smarter meetings?**

Smart meetings and communications are the second Mindful Business Charter pillar. MBC guidance encourages organisations to be intentional about meeting planning and preparation, to ensure meetings are accessible and easy to join, and that they are as participative as possible.

Better meetings bring substantial advantages: **financial gains** from using people’s time effectively, **business benefits** from better exploration of opportunities and risks, and the **wellbeing boost** from people feeling engaged and included.

Action to improve mental health and wellbeing remains vital. Recent Gallup research suggests only 21% of employees feel engaged at work, while 44% experience significant daily stress and 40% daily worry. Bad meetings and meeting overwhelm contribute to long hours working, stress and burnout.

**How can we have smarter meetings?**

Meetings are, ideally, an opportunity for a small number of people to come together, develop their thinking on important issues and decide how best to respond. To improve meetings, we therefore need to improve the quality of the thinking that happens when people come together.

The Thinking Environment helps us achieve that better thinking. When present, its ten components (Attention, Ease, Equality, Difference, Information, Place, Appreciation, Feelings, Encouragement & Incisive Questions) create the conditions for brilliant thinking. Better meetings, for example, need:

* **Attention**: by simply paying attention to the person speaking – putting aside distractions, listening without interruption and with interest in where their thoughts may go next – we encourage more fluid and expansive thinking. We help people feel genuinely heard and valued. And we avoid time-wasting post-meeting clarifications arising from a lack of focus.
* **Ease**: rushed thinking is poor thinking. Agendas with timed items and information shared in advance help people join meetings primed and ready to think. Agendas framed around specific, searching questions help channel that thinking towards the most pressing issues.
* **Equality**: by sharing airtime equally, we ensure everyone’s thoughts have space to emerge, rather than letting a handful of people dominate. Simple structures like Rounds (allowing each person in turn to offer concise thoughts in response to a key question, without interruption) demonstrate equality and allow everyone to participate as thinking peers.

**What actions can we take?**

Consistently smarter meetings happen by design rather than luck. Starting points include committing to pay full attention in the meetings you attend and encouraging others to do the same, or ensuring the meetings you lead always have a short, focused, question-oriented agenda.

Such actions are simple but not necessarily easy, given the meeting dynamics of many organisations. They require consistent, intentional action to build confidence and familiarity but this is repaid many times over by better meetings which secure improved business outcomes and employee wellbeing.

To find out more about transforming meetings with the Thinking Environment, please contact Richard Martin at Mindful Business Charter or Katie Driver at Thinking Alliance.