

Thinking Whole: Essentials, Structures and Systems

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You now have a basic overview of Thinking Whole yet, as they say in those television commercials: “But wait, there’s more!” The system and the process work at their best when the intellectual environment is optimal; and that’s not all that complicated.

Contextual Essentials for Thinking Whole

As you move through the phases of Actionable Insighting, Crystallization, and Actionable Inciting, it has proven wise to embrace the following:

Discipline

Pretty much nothing works very well unless people take it seriously. Thinking Whole can’t do what it does unless we all do what we need to do. You can’t learn to play the piano unless you practice the piano. You can’t play better golf unless you work at the fine points. Play your part. Play by the rules – no matter how flexible or forgiving they at first appear, they ARE rules; and they make the system work.

Joy in Discovery

Einstein once observed: “Creativity is intelligence having fun.” If there’s one thing we have observed over the past score years, plus, it’s that people who are having fun tend to be more creative, more collegial, and more productive. Getting to the joy of discovery is relatively simple. Celebrate each moment of advancement; as nobody likes having to wait for the ending. The more observed the progress, the less onerous the process.

The best group sessions happen when everybody is on the same joyride, so it is critical to mark every moment of progress as it occurs. Call it out. Get everyone to notice. Applause is not a bad thing. Most of all, enjoy taking you mind to the intellectual gym. Take pleasure in being stretched, kneaded, and challenged.

Mindfulness

Open yourself up to being aware of what’s happening in the session. Thinking Whole opens a lot of new avenues, doors, windows, and possibilities. They don’t hang around forever waiting for you to notice. If you don’t see them, they fade away. Thinking whole is not a spectator sport. It’s a kind of full-contact, high intensity, highly engaging team activity. If you’re not aware of what’s going on around you, the chances are pretty good you’re going to be left behind and left out of the action.

Openness

You don’t know what you don’t know until you know you know it. On the one hand, you don’t want to close any doors to possible inspiration. On the other hand, you don’t want to rush through them, either. Take the time to appreciate everything being said. More importantly, take the time to appreciate everything that’s being meant.

All too often, we get hung up on what someone says without allowing ourselves to hear what they mean. The same goes for you and what you yourself say. It's like opening yourself to not just hearing the music, but also to feeling the emotion of every note and, especially, every combination of notes.

Make the most of the Loose Tether It has been said: "The best way to hold your child is with an open palm." That implies the presence of full support when necessary simultaneously aligned with broad ranging and independence.

The Structure and the System of Thinking

Whole offers the same opportunity for the team as well as for each team member. The outcome: Soar as far and as high as you dare yet remain grounded and connected at the same time.

Surrender to the Process

Don't merely trust the process, let it carry you from beginning to end. Our client and friend, Frank, once said to one of us [JK] at the of one of our sessions with a key client: "Hey, Krub, I've got you figure out." To which I could only reply: "ok?" Frank expounded: "John, I notice that every time we're in a meeting and somebody asks an important question, you get up, walk to the front of the room and start by saying 'There are three things we have to consider in answering that question....'"

To which I answered: "OK, Frank, what's your point?" "John, when you start talking and walking, you don't have the slightest idea what those three things are going to be, do you?" Frank replied confidently and expectantly. I focused my eyes squarely on his. "Frank, that's true enough. But I'm ahead of everybody in the room because I know that there always are three things to consider. I just have to fill in the blanks when I pick up the marker."

The point is that having a foundation to think around is like having the required starter yeast for making sourdough bread. You can make something nice tasting from any combination of flour and water, but you can only make sourdough bread with sourdough starter. If you fight the process, you don't get the desired outcome.

Persistent Reflection

Every session of Thinking Whole will generate a lot of statements, a lot of ideas, a lot of conversation, and no small part of challenges. In real estate, it has long been an accepted fundamental that the "three most important things about real estate are – location, location, and location." In our case, the three most important things about Thinking Whole are reflection, reflection, reflection.

Socrates said: "The unexamined life is not worth living." He took that very seriously... and died. Our variation on his theme is a little more lighthearted but no less significant: "The unexamined idea has no place on our flipchart." While some group methodologies insist that every idea is a good idea, we believe that every idea sops up the energy in the room. The more ideas you have, the less energy each idea has.

There is a difference between an idea fully thought out and well-articulated, and an idea fragment. The best way to be sure the room is being filled with actionable ideas is to make sure that everyone on the team is continually reflecting...

Reflecting on what we say even as we say it.

Reflecting on what is being said by others even as they say it.

Continuing to reflect on what has been said by ourselves or others, even if it was said and written down an hour ago.

Continually reflecting on how new ideas in the room, connect to other new ideas in the room.

Continually reflect on how ideas in the room connect to every idea to which we have ever been exposed in whatever capacity.

What Makes Thinking Whole Substantively Different?

Thinking Whole bridges intuitive decisioning and deliberative decisioning. It provides space for the unknowable and unknown as productively as the well-known and the little-known. It is equally comfortable with empirical western conventions as it is with eastern metaphysics, philosophy, and mysticism.

One of our colleagues and friends was trying to “get a handle” on Thinking Whole and posed the question: “Is it like Hegel’s Dialectic?” The short version of the Dialectic is that first, somebody poses a thesis. Then, somebody poses an anti-thesis. These two argue it out, each grinding the edges off of the other, until a syn-thesis is reached. In the end, the dialectic is essentially an oppositional exercise of mutual attrition on the road to something of a compromise in the form of the synthesis. Perhaps the best way to appreciate

Thinking Whole might be to envision a large dark and limitless space. In the center of that space is an illuminated structure (The Form); clear, substantial, yet simultaneously open. Lao Tzu’s “structure” perhaps? The goal is not to reduce the form but, rather, to perceive the completeness which surrounds and embraces the form. While completeness initially exists outside the beam of light in a state of dim perception, we equally sense that something is there, but we cannot yet appreciate its shape, scale, or edges. (Lao Tzu’s “material” perhaps?)

It is only when we stop trying and yield to the process (Lao Tzu’s “energy?”) that things begin to happen. As our collective native intelligence engages in the open and yielding exploration of Thinking Whole, repeatedly shifting between the perceptible center and the imperceptible edges of knowledge, insight, and wisdom, the wholeness reveals itself. We see the connections, the relationships, and the interplay of the perceptible and the previously imperceptible in perfect balance. What once was in darkness is made clear.

What once distracted us from seeing completeness has dimmed in dominance and is seen as part of a greater, now equally substantial totality. Because we opened our minds to the inevitable existence of completeness, it manifests itself. The result is enlightenment of the whole, a moment of genius, and the revelation of otherwise unapparent connections. (Lao Tzu’s “energy” again? OK, so it sounds a bit metaphysical or philosophical; to which we respond – “what’s wrong with that?” We did say earlier on that TW is the result of a fully integrated, multi-disciplinary, and multi-cultural knowledgebase on the subject of enlightenment and how it has been achieved around the globe and across the millennia; no holds barred, not limits, no preconceptions. So here we are.