

## **FOCUS & PURPOSE**

Most thinking just wanders along from point to point. The thinker lets each point suggest the next point. In a conversation what someone says triggers what other people think and say. There is a sort of vague and general notion of the subject matter and the purpose of the thinking - but this is very much in the background. This is one of the major causes of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in thinking.

Having looked at some thinking tools and some thinking habits it is now time to consider 'focus and purpose'. This is another thinking habit. This means that we should routinely be conscious of focus and purpose in all our thinking. A habit is something that should be part of all our thinking. A tool is something we choose to use on occasions. There are some related tools (AGO and FIP) and these will be considered in the next few pages.

In a furniture showroom I am considering buying a new dining-room table. I am focusing on the table. But right now I am looking at the table legs - are they sturdy enough? Then I look at the surface of the table - is it likely to stain or be damaged by hot things? My attention is caught by a scratch mark on the surface. The point is that my over-all objective is to consider buying the table. But at any point my thinking may be focused on a smaller point within that over-all objective. Not only is my thinking focused on a smaller point but the thinking about that smaller point has its own defined purpose (is this scratch significant?).

It is not enough to have a general sense of the objective of the thinking. We need to know at each moment what the focus is and what we are trying to do. This requires a certain amount of discipline and a certain amount of blue-hat thinking. We need to stand back from our thinking in order to see what is happening.

## **KEY QUESTIONS**

All thinking habits have some key questions that we should be asking ourselves all the time. For focus and purpose these are:

What am I looking at (thinking about) right now?

What am I trying to do?

You can ask yourself such questions from time to time in your thinking. You can raise such questions at a meeting which seems to be getting nowhere.

## **SETTING THE FOCUS**

Just as we need to be aware of the focus and purpose so we should also be able to set the focus and purpose.

What do you want to focus on?

Both from moment to moment and also in setting a thinking agenda (blue hat) you should be able to pick out and define different focus areas - and what you want to do with each focus area.

## **TYPE OF THINKING**

We can consider four broad types of thinking:

Exploring: Looking around, increasing our knowledge and awareness of the subject. We want to make a better map of it.

Seeking: Here we have a definite need. We want something. We want to end up with something specific. We may need a solution for a problem. We may need a design or a new creative idea. We may need to resolve a conflict. This is very different from just exploring. In this context the word 'seeking' also means 'constructing'. It is not as if the solution lies hidden somewhere and we just have

to find it. We have to construct the solution just as we have to put together a design. So we talk of 'seeking to come up with the desired outcome'.

Choosing: There are a number of alternatives and we have to make a choice or decision. There might be just one action course and our choice is whether to use it or not. To some extent choosing comes into most thinking. For example in design or in problem-solving we reach the point where there are several possible alternatives and we have to choose between them.

Organizing: Here all the pieces are present just as the pieces of a puzzle might all be present. We have to put the pieces together in the most effective way. We move things around. We try one way or another. We use various thinking tools (APC, OPV, C&S etc.). Designing a house is part of creative thinking and part of 'seeking' thinking. Putting the house up is part of organizing thinking. Laying out a plan and carrying out the plan can both be part of organizing thinking.

Checking: Is this correct? Is this right? Does it fit the evidence? Is it safe? Is it acceptable? This is black-hat thinking or critical thinking. We react to what is put before us. We judge it. We check it.

Obviously there is a certain amount of checking that goes into all thinking (problem solutions, designs, choices, organizing etc.), but this type of thinking also exists in its own right.

It can be useful as part of focus/purpose to be aware of the type of thinking that is being done.

#### EXERCISES ON FOCUS AND PURPOSE

1. A designer is designing a new cup. What five aspects of a cup might she focus on? For example she might focus on the handle.
2. In a discussion on growing grapes in California the thinking seems to be focusing on the width of the space running between the vines. What do you think might be the purpose of this focus?
3. You are going to prepare a meal for three of your friends. List five things you might focus on. For example you might focus on where you are going to eat the meal.
4. You bought a cassette player from a store. The quality is not what you had expected. You want to take the player back. What should you focus on?
5. You are having a party at home for twenty of your friends. But another twenty uninvited guests turn up. These are people you know but are not friends of yours. What should you focus on and what is the purpose of your thinking for each focus?
6. An entrepreneur is setting up an ice-cream shop in your area. He focuses upon the following points:
  - quality of product
  - known brand image
  - advertising and publicity
  - getting good staff
7. What else should he focus on?
8. A friend of yours has lost a pet dog of which she is very fond. You go over to help her. What are the three most important things to focus on?
9. A bad highway accident in which a coach is involved means that a lot of seriously injured people are taken to the nearest hospital. What should the chief of the hospital focus on?