

WALKING AROUND USING PARALLEL THINKING TO BOOST UP THE EFFICIENCY OF MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Swarnim Kuber Pathak



*And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!*

*Blind Men and the Elephant
(By John Godfrey Saxe)*

There is a popular story about 6 blind men and an elephant. Each of them touches a different part of the elephant and expresses what the elephant is. Although they are touching the same elephant, each man's description is completely different from that of the others and each of them is telling the truth as per their perception of reality.

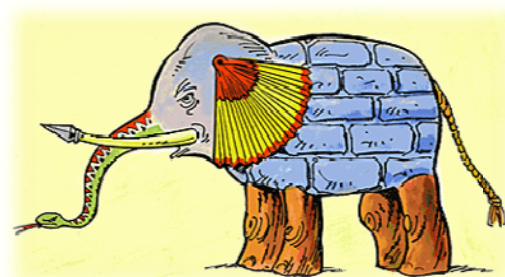
It is understandable that being blind is a constraint that is out of control for these men. But suppose these men use their brain and realize they are only blind with perfectly functional limbs. So they walk around together, touching the same part of the elephant at same time.

- Won't the definition of elephant be more accurate this time?
- Won't it be much faster?
- Won't it be less argumentative?
- Won't it be effective?

Same is the situation with our discussions and meetings. We face nearly same conflicts of feelings and logic in our day to day life. The problem is that though we see a problem using different lenses of objectivity and emotions, the point of view of each of us remains same. **(Quite funny to Say -We do not walk around the elephant, because we are blind!!!)**. Our perception gives us an illusion that what we are seeing is a reality and our ego gives us this resistance to walk.

So even after changing the lenses the view remains unidirectional i.e. even after looking at a problem with great technical, creative as well as managerial outlook we tend to stop our self from walking around the problem due to the layers of experience covered with a polish of ego. This often leads to arguments which tend to become destructive and hamper our Professional as well as personal lives.

*So oft in theological wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!*



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It should also be noticed that all arguments cannot be attributed to logical inconsistency. There might be arguments that come out of two logically sound theories. This is when the real conflicts arise. From primitive times, in a conflict between two logically sound arguments the reality had been the final arbiter. But today's competitive world does not provide us this luxury of internal arguments being judged by reality. Today when the effective organizations spend most of their time in planning a project, an argumentative planning (with ultimate reality as final judge) will first lead to loss and then to learning. No business in today's competitive world can afford loss at the verge of learning.

A better way of conflict free and non argumentative way of discussion, developed by Mr. Edward De Bono, and traditionally used by Japanese, has been the method of parallel thinking. In this methods the members of a discussion not only sees a problem with different lenses but also from different directions at same time. **(They walk around even though they are blind☺)**. This makes each of them have a holistic view of the scenario, preventing any arguments.

Removing the arguments increases the effectiveness of meeting because now the **focus is on reaching the best solution rather than proving your solution the best**. The focus now shifts from "What it is" to "What can be". So now each person does not explain the elephant like an Wall, tree, snake, fan, spear or a rope but defines it as "from here I find it like a rope, but let me walk around and also see the other angles".

Literature Source

***Six Thinking Hats* by Edward De Bono**
***Blind Men and the Elephant* by John Godfrey Saxe**

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