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Chunking Up and Down - advice for those preparing for the ICC Mediation Competition in Paris

Geoff Sharp (Brick Court Chambers / Clifton Chambers) · Monday, January 2nd, 2017

While I haven't been to the ICC competition for a few years, I am so looking forward to attending in early February. Paris in the dead of winter is magical. Those lonely 6am starts from an empty and frigid Charles de Gaulle Étoile on Paris Métro Line 1 are a right of passage for any aspiring mediator.



And I am told by colleagues that the standard of play has only increased year on year since I was last there. So with that in mind, lets take your mediation thinking up a notch or two...

I sat with a group of geo-techs and engineers on the Tuesday before Christmas and then, in a different mediation a couple of days later, some serial start up entrepreneurs.

The differences in the way each of these mediations thought through the problem that had brought the group to the table could not have been more stark.

The scientists *chunked down to smaller moving parts*; the entrepreneurs *chunked up to consider the whole engine first*.

The engineers said, *'well how else do you eat an elephant if it's not one bite at a time?'* I said *'do you mean decomposition?'* They rolled their eyes.

The entrepreneurs, on the other hand, said *'lets see what is generically/conceptually possible before spending energy on working out the detail - if we can agree on the what, we will agree on the how'*.

You know, *street > block > city > county > state > country* or going the other way *forest > tree > branch > leaf*.

So, the right brain entrepreneurs moved from the general to the specific; thinking conceptually before considering if the mechanics exist to achieve it; looking for linkages and themes...

The left brain engineers took a more granular approach going to the detail first.

Chunking up (going to bigger broader chunks of thought) is about taking a broader view. Helicopter up to 30,000 feet. Survey the landscape to see the whole system.

Chunking down (going to smaller more detailed chunks of thought) is about going into detail to find smaller and more specific elements of the system.

Chunk up;

What does this mean?

Let's look at the bigger picture...

How does that relate to...?

Hang on, what are we trying to achieve here?

Who is this for? What do they really want?

Chunk down;

How did you do that?

Why did that happen?

What happened about...?


What, specifically,...

Tell me more about...

What is the root cause of all this?

Make sense?


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