

## **Global Leaders in Argument Mapping Certify Molesworth Analysts & Instructors**

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AUSTHINK Consulting's Principal, Dr. Tim van Gelder, Cognitive Scientist and pioneer in Argument Mapping (AM), brought an innovative and challenging program to Molesworth analysts and methodology instructors, in April. It was the first ever Argument Mapping Certification course offered in the United States Intelligence Community. All eight students achieved Bronze level certification, with three also reaching the highly demanding Silver level.

Intelligence analysts are in the business of manufacturing knowledge. It is our core; it is our nucleus. The Analytic component of any intelligence enterprise, regardless of size, parent organization, location, or mission, is the only necessary and sufficient component of that enterprise. Every other component, be it Collections, Security, Disseminations or Logistics, are enablers. They enable Analysis. Analysis is necessary. If we don't do it, we fail. Analysis is sufficient. If it is all we do, we succeed. Analysis is the only component of our profession that we can describe in these terms.

Yet we pay little attention to the singular skill required to do analysis well: Argument. Every intelligence assessment is a judgment. Every analytic judgment is a claim. Every claim is a contention, the end state of an argument. Argumentation should be the one proven arrow in an analyst/critical thinker's quiver.

The only method demonstrated to result in significant quantitative gains in critical thinking abilities is Argument Mapping.\* This method makes argumentation highly explicit in accordance with fundamental principles of logic. It uses diagrams or "maps" to display argument structures, on the grounds that good visualizations help our brains to process complexity.

In graphing one's reasoning using these high fidelity techniques, conclusions and contentions become clearer, inferences become tighter, assumptions emerge, and source basis sensitivities are made manifest. Such explicitness results in improved analytic accuracy, enhanced ability to recognize weaknesses, and a clear pathway to making an argument stronger.

So, since argumentation writ large is part of our analytic DNA, and Argument Mapping is the only proven technique shown to improve critical thinking skills, demonstrated competence in AM ought to be a part of any analytic methodology regime. Unfortunately however, while many courses and curricula expose the student to basic AM principles, few offer in-depth exploration and dedicated practice required to develop genuine competence in the technique.

At the EUCOM-AFRICOM Regional Joint Intelligence Training Facility (RJITF) we are trying to do our part to remedy this deficit. With the support and advocacy of EUCOM and AFRICOM seniors and analytic management, we have crafted an approach to our methodology and critical thinking course offerings to reflect and feature argumentation generally, and Argument Mapping specifically, as central elements. In order to do this to the high level required, we brought AUSTHINK here to the UK to certify selected instructors and analysts as AM practitioners, and in doing so have raised their game on the podium and in the work center.

Our AUSTHINK “master class,” delivered by Dr. van Gelder, was designed to fully immerse the students immediately and rapidly into these challenging cognitive waters. Over four days of instruction, we (1) covered AM theory and lexicon, (2) drilled extensively on the finer points of argument structure, (3) practiced using concise rules which determine the quality of relationships between premises, (4) assessed the varying types of bases used as evidence, (5) comprehensively evaluated the overall quality of arguments, and (6) practiced taking a well-done map, interpreting it, and expressing it in a written narrative format.

At the conclusion of the masterclass we took a high-pressure, timed exam designed to assess our fluency in each of these areas. The exam papers were scored in a “double-blind” fashion by independent argument mapping experts, who assessed performance against a detailed specification of the knowledge and skills required for certification. This ensured an exceptional level of rigor and objectivity in the certification process.

Add to that brief excursions into confidence and provisionality assessment, hypothesis generation & testing, and decision mapping, and you would not be surprised to know that we were all, to a student, breathless at the end of it all. We knew we had experienced something remarkable.

Analysis without facility in argument is, in the words of Thomas Hardy, “a preface without a volume.” Our challenge is to manufacture knowledge which is reasoned relevant, and right. The users of our product demand it. We must demand it of ourselves. We have always been a community that consistently demonstrates episodic brilliance. Our goal, however, should be enduring incandescence. I’m not convinced that there is any one Way, or one technique that will be embraced and adored by all, and fix our ample set of collective community problems. But at the very least, I’d submit that we all get on board with the idea that argument is the center of our profession, and then let’s take steps to get better at it. Argument Mapping is a damned powerful way to do that. That’s my conclusion, at least.

\* See Charles Twardy’s “Argument Maps Improve Critical Thinking”, (2003)